CIRCUSES IN LINCOLN’S SPRINGFIELD
(1833-1860)

Spring Creek Series

Richard E. Hart
Dedicated to my grandchildren, Will, Mimi, RE, Wes and Sena, who bring me the joy of the circus every day.

Other Publications by Richard E. Hart

Spring Creek Series

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Lincoln’s Springfield – Abel W. Estabrook : Robert Todd Lincoln’s Abolitionist Teacher (2009)
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Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield (1833-1860) Spring Creek Series.
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# INTRODUCTION

## MR. LINCOLN AND THE CIRCUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>Lincoln Attends A Summer Circus in Springfield</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Miller, Yale &amp; Sands Menagerie and Circus United</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>H. A. Woodward &amp; Co. Menagerie and Circus</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>William Seely The Menagerie and Circus</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>June, Titus, Angevine &amp; Co. Circus and Caravan</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>Howes &amp; Mabie Olympic Arena or New York Circus</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>June &amp; Turner New York Circus</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>E. F. Mabie &amp; Co. Grand Olympic and U. S. Circus</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>E. F. &amp; J. Mabie Grand Olympic Arena and U. S. Circus</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>Welch, Delavan &amp; Nathan's National Circus</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Raymond &amp; Co.'s Mammoth Menagerie and Herr Driesbach</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>E. F. &amp; J. Mabie Grand Olympic Arena and U. S. Circus</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>Crane &amp; Co.'s Great Oriental Circus</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>E. F. &amp; J. Mabie Grand Olympic Arena and U. S. Circus</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Crane &amp; Co.'s Great Oriental Circus</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents

American Circus .................................................................................................................................................................................38
1851 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................40
E. F. & J. Mabie’s Grand Olympic Arena and U. S. Circus .................................................................40
1852 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................41
Great United States Circus Older & Co. (formerly Mabie’s Circus) ....................................................................................................41
The Great French Circus of James M. June & Co. ..................................................................................43
Raymond & Co., and Van Amburgh & Co Menageries United ..........................................................44
1853 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................45
P. T. Barnum’s Grand Colossal Museum and Menagerie .................................................................45
1854 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................46
Franconi’s Hippodrome .................................................................................................................................................................46
L. G. Butler’s Arena and Circus ................................................................................................................48
E. F. & J. Mabie’s Circus and Menagerie .................................................................................................49
1855 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................50
Raymond’s Amphitheatre and Burlesque Cirque De Hippodrome ......................................................50
W. J. W. Wick’s Great Western Rail Road Circus ..................................................................................51
Sands, Nathans & Co.’s American Circus .................................................................................................52
Orton’s Circus .................................................................................................................................................................54
Van Amburgh & Co’s Menagerie, Den Stone’s Circus of the People & Tyler’s Indian Exhibition ..........54
1856 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................55
Yankee Robinson’s Big Show ................................................................................................................55
Mabie’s Circus Happenings ....................................................................................................................56
Sands, Nathans & Co.’s American Circus .................................................................................................57
G. F. Bailey & Co.’s Combined Circus and Menagerie ........................................................................59
Levi J. North’s National Circus ..............................................................................................................60
Herr Driesbach & Co.’s Great Colossal Consolidated Circus & Menagerie ........................................61
1857 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................62
Nixon & Kemp’s Great Eastern Circus .................................................................................................62
L. B. Lent’s Mammoth National Circus .................................................................................................64
S. P. Stickney’s Great Southern Circus ..................................................................................................65
Major Brown’s Monster Colloseum and Great American Circus .....................................................66
1858 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................67
Cooper & Myers’ Circus of All Nations ...............................................................................................67
Levi J. North .................................................................................................................................................................68
Burt & Robinson’s Circus ......................................................................................................................68
Spalding & Rogers New Orleans Circus .............................................................................................69
Mabie & Crosby’s French and American Circus .................................................................................70
1859 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................71
Donetti and Col. Wood’s Grand Burlesque Circus ..............................................................................71
1860 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................72
Van Amburgh Show .................................................................................................................................................................72
H. Buckley & Cos. Great National Circus ...............................................................................................73
The R. Sands Gigantic Combination Circus ......................................................................................74
Dan Rice’s Great Show .........................................................................................................................................................75
THE CIRCUS IN MIDWESTERN LITERATURE ...........................................................................................................77
THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN BY MARK TWAIN, A.K.A. SAMUEL CLEMENS (1835-1910) ......................................................................................................................77
PRAIRIE-TOWN BOY, FAIR AND CIRCUS DAYS, CARL SANDBURG .........................................................78
BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................................................................................79
INTRODUCTION

Imagine living in a town of less than 1,000 people on the edge of the American frontier in the mid-nineteenth century. Most of the things you need are locally produced and most of the people you know are from your town or the surrounding countryside. You have little contact with the larger world other than what is reported in the local newspaper.

And then one day, the circus comes to town. It is a total diversion from the routine of your day-to-day life. It is whimsical. It is colorful and fun. You have ridden horses all of your life, but could not possibly duplicate the skills of the circus equestrians. You see a variety of animals you have only read about and perhaps feared. Another of your fears—heights—is trivialized by the performers on the “wire” from the ground to the top of the circus tent. The appeal of the circus knows no particular age, race, class or sex. Its performers are exotic and from afar. It has a certain charismatic, mystical allure like the Sirens of Greek mythology. “Come with us and escape the hum drum life of your hometown.” It smells of sawdust and animals. It is loud and sounds like an old time calliope. It glitters with spangles and is frivolous in an otherwise serious world of hardscrabble, self-sufficient survival. Like the glow of a firefly on a summer’s night, it is short lived—here today and gone tomorrow.

The annual, one-day visit of the circus to hundreds of small American towns became a seasonal part of the culture of 19th century America. From memories of such circuses, Midwestern authors have written classic descriptions of circus day and the circus’ impact on the Midwestern psyche. As a young man, Samuel Clemens, later known as Mark Twain, attended the circus in his hometown of Hannibal Missouri. It is said that this was his inspiration for the famous circus descriptions of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. In Prairie-town Boy-Fair and Circus Days, Carl Sandburg shared his childhood memories of the circus in his hometown of Galesburg, Illinois. Even Illinois native Earnest Hemmingway loved the circus and described it as having the quality of a truly happy dream.

In addition to the circus’ unique contribution to frontier life, the circus left us with a rich collection of fanciful circus newspaper advertisements. In Lincoln’s Springfield, these ads were published in the Journal and Register newspapers. On any page where these ads appear, they shouted to the reader, “Look at me!” And look one did and still does at the cartoonlike figures of elephants and wild animals and aerialists on tight wires to church belfries and the tops of circus tents. The prose, printed in a variety of fonts that could only have been created by a drunken typesetter, were a mish mash of exaggerated circus claims and descriptions of exotic performances and dare devil acts. Famous clowns, performers and elephants were named. The time of the opening day circus parade was announced as were the performance times and prices for box seats and pit standing.

The presence of the circus in Lincoln’s Springfield was noted in Here I Have Lived, Paul Angle’s classic history of antebellum Springfield. The book contains an illustration of one of those circus advertisements, and that illustration was the beginning of my curiosity about circuses in Lincoln’s Springfield. Over the years, I have found other circus ads while combing microfilm of Springfield’s Journal and Register. These random discoveries have kept my interest in circuses alive. More recent technology and the internet have been my friend in pursuing that interest. Genealogybank.com, a recent internet site that has digitalized newspapers and made them searchable, has allowed me to find what I believe to be all of the circus
advertisements in the *Journal* and the *Register* for the period 1833 through 1860. I found advertisements from those newspapers for 50 circuses that performed in Springfield, Illinois, during that period. Those ads are reproduced here.

Initially that was the extent of my interest—discover all of the circuses that had appeared in ante bellum Springfield, note the circus’ cultural contributions to Midwestern life and literature and include images of the fanciful circus ads. Another snapshot of Lincoln’s Springfield added to my Spring Creek Series.

And then I asked myself, “What did Abraham Lincoln think of the circus and did he attend any of the 50 Springfield circuses?” Now, don’t laugh so hard. Lincoln has been diced, sliced and dissected to reveal almost every aspect of his life. Yet to many, including me, he still remains an enigma. Perhaps that unknown, unrevealed, mysterious characteristic of Lincoln adds to our obsessive fascination with every facet of his life and personality. His relationship to the circus, however, is one part of his life that has remained unexplored until now. Again, I ask you to refrain from laughing. Perhaps just a chuckle would be all right. So here I go.

I believe that Lincoln loved the circus. It brought him great joy. That love and joy perhaps originated in his morose personality’s need for humor and entertainment. The circus allowed him to escape the sad and oppressive dreary realities of life. I believe that Lincoln likely not only attended many of the 50 Springfield circuses noted here, but that he shared his love of the circus and children by taking his boys and neighborhood children with him to the circus.

So in addition to learning about the 50 circuses in Lincoln’s Springfield, the reader will enjoy a glimpse into an informal yet important aspect of Lincoln’s personality. He loved the circus.

I hope you will enjoy this whimsical journey – *Circuses in Lincoln’s Springfield*.

Richard E. Hart
Springfield, Illinois
September 26, 2013
Mr. Lincoln and the Circus

Mr. Lincoln was particularly fond of going to the circus. Whenever a circus came to town he was pretty certain to gather together all the children in our neighborhood and take us to it and he seemed to enjoy it quite as much as any of us....

Josephine E. Remann Edwards  
[Mrs. Albert S. Edwards]

Lincoln was a melancholy man. There may be differences of opinion about the degree of that melancholy in 21st century diagnostic terms, but he was indeed a melancholy man. He often warded off that melancholy with jokes and laughter. He explained, “I laugh because I must not cry. That is all. That is all.” The circus’ therapeutic benefit was explained by Ernest Hemmingway who revealed the wonderful escape he experienced at the circus.

The circus is the only ageless delight that you can buy for money. Everything else is supposed to be bad for you. But the circus is good for you. It’s the only spectacle I know that, while you watch it, gives the quality of a truly happy dream.

It is fun to imagine Abraham Lincoln sitting in a circus box with his sons and the neighborhood children. Together they watch the menagerie of animals and circus performers. Lincoln relaxed, indeed, smiling as the clowns prompt him to join the children in laughing out loud. Here then are examples of instances that collectively led me to believe that Abraham Lincoln and his family loved the circus.

Summer 1833

Abraham Lincoln Attends His First Circus

In the summer of 1833, the first circus to perform in Springfield was attended by Abraham Lincoln, then a 24 year-old New Salem resident. Springfield’s population was approximately 900. This undoubtedly was the first circus attended by Lincoln. Evidence of his attendance is found in the following 1902 reminiscence of T. G. Onstot, a resident of New Salem in 1833.

In the summer of 1833 the first circus and menagerie ever known in the west was billed to be in Springfield while Mr. Lincoln was postmaster at Salem. The putting up of the bills created intense excitement in all the Springfield country. Thousands of the pioneers had never seen such a show. Ross who carried the mail at that time, though living in Havana, was determined if possible to be in Springfield to see the street parade, which was to take place at 12 o’clock and also to see the show. So he started the night before at 12 o’clock with the mail and got to Salem at sunrise the next morning. He went to the tavern to get his breakfast and have his horse fed and was told that Lincoln had gone to the country the day before to do some surveying and had not returned, and that Bill Berry, his partner, had been to a dance the night before. The dance did not break up till daylight and Bill was well nigh filled up with eggnog and Ross feared that he would have some trouble waking him up to change the mail. After breakfast he found Bill in a profound slumber in a little room adjoining the post office. For a half hour Ross pounded on the door and yelled and shouted, but all in vain. It would have taken the angel Gabriel’s trumpet to wake him up. So Ross threw his mailbags across his horse and went on his journey. He left the mail that belonged to Salem at Sangamon and asked the postmaster to keep it until

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1 Journal, June 12, 1907, p. 5.
2 T. G. Onstot, merchant, Forest City; was born in Sugar Grove, in what is now Menard Co. His father settled in that section in 1824, being one of the very first settlers of Sangamon Co. The Onstot family moved to New Salem, on the Sangamon River, in 1831. At this time, the timber-lands along the Sangamon and Salt Creek were full of roving Indians. The family remained at New Salem, where the elder Mr. Onstot kept the village tavern, until 1840. Abraham Lincoln boarded at this house when he began his first law studies with Squire Green, and made his home with the Onstot family for two years, during which time young Lincoln practiced surveying in the surrounding country. Mr. Lincoln and the elder Mr. Onstot were warm friends as long as they lived. 1879 History of Menard & Mason Counties, Chicago, Published by: O.L. Baskin & Co., Historical Publishers, 186 Dearborn Street, p. 850.
the next day, when he would get it on his return. He hurried on and got to Springfield in time to see the parade.

There was a mighty host of people in town who had come from far and near. Some had come twenty miles, bringing their families with them. It was wonderful what an attraction a circus was. I have seen the Bottomites, as they here called at Havana, commence gathering money a month ahead of a show. They would bring blackberries, or a load of clapboards, or rails, or anything else that would sell for money. Some would do without coffee, whisky or tobacco until they had enough money saved to go to the show, or just to take their children to see the animals. Another class and a meaner one I think is the man who goes to town and sees the street parade and then is too little to pay his money to go into the tent and patronize the show.

Probably there never was such excitement in Springfield as there was that day except on two other occasions. The first was when Lincoln piloted the Tailsman up the Sangamon and landed her near Springfield. The people then believed that the Sangamon would always be navigable for steamboats and they were wild with excitement with the outlook for Springfield’s prosperity. The other great excitement was when the state capitol was moved from Vandalia to Springfield. There were two things connected with the show, which astonished the people wonderfully. One was a monster anaconda snake eighteen feet long, and the other a young lady who stood on a horse and rode at full speed around the ring. If there was anything that would bring fear and terror to the early settlers was the sight of a snake. They had seen so many cases where people had been bitten by snakes and the terrible sufferings they had endured that they had good reasons to dread snakes. The snake in the Garden of Eden has done so much damage to the human family that we may we beware of snakes. So when the showman took the monster from the iron cage and it crawled upon his shoulders with its hideous head extended far above him and with its forked tongue darting out six inches and its baneful eyes that looked like balls of fire, the audience was transfixed with terror. But when the showman commenced to carry the hideous thing around the ring close to the people, the women would scream, the children cry and the men would yell for the snake to be put in the cage. So the showman had to stop the horrid performance and put the anaconda back in the cage or there would have been a general stampede from the big tent. However, the people approached cautiously afterwards to gaze upon the big snake. The people were entranced with the spangled young woman who rode at full speed around the ring standing upon the horse. It was a common sight in those days to see a woman driving horses while they held the plow, or to see them on horseback going to the mill. The pioneer girls and women were expert horsewomen in a sidesaddle or even bareback. But when it came to a pretty girl standing on a horse going at full speed it took the people’s breath away and made their hearts stand still. No mortal of them could ever have believed that a girl could do a thing like that until they had seen it.

No rain had fallen in Springfield for several weeks and the black dust lay deep in all the roads and streets. The big crowd kept it well stirred up and the women and children in their holiday clothes were a sight to behold.

Mr. Lincoln got back to Salem a few hours after Ross had passed through and was a little displeased because he had not left the mail, not knowing the cause. With every man and woman, who paid his and her way, Mr. Lincoln went to the show. After the performance was over Ross met Lincoln on the street and as they met Ross noticed a scowl on Lincoln’s face. Lincoln said to him "How did it happen that you did not have the mail changed when you came through Salem. You might get me in trouble about this. Suppose the postmaster at Springfield should report the fact that the mail was not changed at Salem to the department at Washington, but was brought on to Springfield. What would happen to me?" But when Ross told him the whole story, how he had gotten up at 12 o’clock at night so he could get to Springfield to see the show come to town, and that he had never seen a show and how anxious he was to see one and how hard he had tried to get Billy Berry up to open the mail and that he had not brought the mail to Springfield but had left it at Sangamon and would carry it back to Salem in the morning, Mr. Lincoln in a kind voice said, “Oh, well that is all right. Bill Berry ought to have gotten up and changed the mail for your.” Then he said, “I am going home this evening and I will stop and get the mail and carry it home with me.” Ross found next day that he had done so.

When Ross met Lincoln he noticed that he had a new suit of clothes on and a new hat. While talking to him Ross had a good opportunity to scrutinize his whole wardrobe and he could remember everything he had on. The coat and pants were of brown linen, the vest white with dots of flowers in it. The shirt was open front and buttoned up with small ivory buttons. The collar was wide and folded over the collar of his coat. He had for a necktie a black silk handkerchief with a narrow fringe to it and it was tied in a double bow. He wore a pair of low shoes tied in a double bow over the instep. He had a
buckeye hat on. It was made of buckeye splints and was much like the fashionable straw hats. The buckeye hats were much worn in those days and cost twice as much as a straw hat from $1.25 to $1.50 apiece. So the reader may see how Mr. Lincoln looked when dressed for a circus.

When Ross got back to Salem next morning he found that Lincoln had given the people their mail and that Bill Berry was very sorry for his misconduct, and that Lincoln had washed off the Springfield dust and was amiable and happy as ever.

1837-1860

Abraham Lincoln Moves to Springfield, Marries and Has Four Sons

In April 1837 Abraham Lincoln moved from New Salem to Springfield, where he lived for 25 years. On November 4, 1842, he married Mary Todd and for a short time they lived in one room at the Globe Tavern where their first son, Robert Todd, was born on August 1, 1843.

From the Globe Tavern, the Lincolns moved to a small rental cottage for a short time, and in 1844, they moved to a house at the northeast corner of Eighth and Jackson Streets. Here three more sons were born and the family lived until moving to Washington, D. C. in February 1861. During those Springfield years, the Lincolns had ample opportunity to attend many of the 50 circuses that passed through Springfield and there is very good evidence that Lincoln took his boys and the neighborhood children to circuses.

As a young boy, Robert went missing and after much searching was found at a circus dressed as a cowboy. No doubt Robert attended circuses in Springfield. Edward (Eddie) Baker, the second son, was born on March 10, 1848 and died at age 3 ¾ on February 1, 1850. Eddie probably never attended the circus. Their third son, William (Willie) Wallace, was born on December 21, 1850. William died when he was 11 years old on February 20, 1862 in Washington, D. C. Willie loved the circus and most assuredly attended in Springfield. So did Thomas (Tad), the Lincolns’ fourth and final son, who was born on April 4, 1853. In the spring of 1861, young Tad and Willie, newly moved into the White House, set up a circus in the attic of their new home and charged admission. No doubt some of the models for their venture were the Springfield circuses they had attended.

When a Lincoln neighbor child, little Miss Sprigg, was just learning to walk, Lincoln took her to a circus parade. Another neighbor Josephine Remann remembered that Lincoln took the neighborhood children to the circus and liked it as well as the children.

Later, Mrs. Lincoln invited Tom Thumb, the quintessential circus performer and darling of American pop culture, and his new bride to a reception and sleep over at the White House.

Robert Todd Lincoln and The Circus

I imagine the adult Robert Lincoln as a starched, suspendered and buttoned down gentleman and an American industrialist and diplomat. I was surprised when I found these newspaper descriptions of Robert as a young schoolboy in Springfield being lured to a circus where his friends found him dressed in a Texas hat and boots.

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3 *Pioneers of Menard & Mason Counties Including Personal Reminiscenses of Abraham Lincoln & Peter Cartwright*, by T.G. Onstot, 1902, Chapter III, Lincoln Attends A Circus, p. 46. Transcribed by Brenda Hamilton Johnson.
Josephine E. Remann Remembers Abraham Lincoln’s Fondness of Going to the Circus and Taking Neighborhood Kids

Josephine E. Remann was born in Vandalia, Illinois in April 1842. Her family moved to Springfield and in 1849, were living at the southeast corner of Eighth and Market (Capitol) Streets, just at the north end of the block where the Lincolns lived. Josephine’s mother died in 1849 or 1850 and the family continued to live there. Josephine was loved by the Lincolns and was said to be considered as the daughter they never had. Josephine was seven when her family moved to the Lincoln neighborhood and 18 when the Lincolns moved to Washington, D.C.

Josephine E. Remann Edwards (Mrs. Albert S. Edwards) knew Lincoln from her childhood, and spoke tenderly of his unfailing kindness to her and the other children of the neighborhood. “He used to take us to the circus,” she said.

Mr. Lincoln was particularly fond of going to the circus. Whenever a circus came to town he was pretty certain to gather together all the children in our neighborhood and take us to it and he seemed to enjoy it quite as much as any of us...

Abraham Lincoln Takes Little Miss Sprigg to a Circus Parade

In 1853, the widow Julia Sprigg purchased a home in the Lincoln neighborhood. She lived there with her children Margaret H. (16 years old), Fred R. (13 years old), John C. (7 years old), Ann E. (4 years old), Zachary T. (2 years old), and Isabella (3 months old). While living in the house, Julia Sprigg became close friends with neighbor Mary Lincoln, and the Lincolns’ youngest son, Tad, was a frequent visitor. The Lincolns often hosted social gatherings for their friends and neighbors, and Julia Sprigg was an active participant.

New Hampshire Sentinel, Thursday, November 14, 1867.
Commercial Advertiser, Tuesday, October 29, 1867.


Photographic Divisions, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois. Taken by Springfield photographer Christopher Smith German. Provided by Roberta Fairburn.
visitor to the Sprigg house. Julia often told how when her daughter was just learning to walk, Abraham Lincoln carried her in his arms to see a circus parade.

![Map showing the location of the Remann and Sprigg Houses in the Lincoln Neighborhood.]

1856

Abraham Lincoln Invited to Speak in Charleston on Circus Day

On July 14, 1856, Thomas A. Marshall of Charleston, Coles County, Illinois, wrote to Abraham Lincoln urging him to come there and speak on the day the circus would be in town.

…we think one of your speeches now will be worth two after a while. There will be a big circus here on the 24th and a crowd ready collected for you if you should come that day. You know all about circuses. They collect crowds, but not exactly the sort of crowd we want.11

1858

Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Douglas and the Circus

There were few large indoor meeting places in ante bellum Illinois. If an event needed space for 1,000 people, it could only be held in the open air. Along came the circus tent capable of accommodating up to 5,000 and it was soon sought as a public place for other than circus activities. The most famous series of events involving circus tents occurred in 1858 during the Senate race between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas in Illinois.12

September 4, 1858, Lincoln, Illinois—Douglas Speaks to 5,000 in Circus Tent

Senator Douglas was to speak in Lincoln, Illinois, on September 4, which was also circus day. Spalding & Rogers’ advertisement in the Logan County News had this trailer: “The daylight performance at 11 and 1/2 will conclude before Judge Douglas’ speech for whose use the pavilion of the circus has been tendered to the Committee of Arrangements.

… a big wagon was put in the tent when the matinee ended. On it was placed the concert stage, for a speaker’s platform. The sidewalls were “appropriately draped.” Five thousand people listened to the “little Giant” for two hours.


12 American Circus Anthology, Essays of the Early Years, arranged and edited by William L. Slout, 2005, by Stuart Thayer and William L. Slout. (Hereafter referred to as American Circus Anthology.)
“Gloom palled the spirits of the Democrats the following morning,” Warner related, “for every Republican newspaper within reach of the telegraph appeared with flaming headlines, scoring Douglas for hiring out to a circus.”

The Chicago Press and Tribune... printed, “Douglas Following a Circus,” with a sub-head saying, “Novel Acrobatic Performances.” The article asked would he be the rider, the acrobat, or the clown, and decided that he would be the contortionist, since he had come down on both sides of so many issues.13

September 9, 1858, Hillsboro, Illinois—Abraham Lincoln Speaks in Circus Tent

Abraham Lincoln was to give a speech in Hillsboro, Illinois, on September 9, a circus date, and Warner, the circus agent there, had arranged with the local Republican committee to use the circus tent. However, after the comments on Douglas’ use of the facility, the locals said, “No tents for us. This is too good a thing on Douglas. We’ve arranged to hold our meeting in the grove...”

The grove was about half-a-mile beyond the circus lot and everyone - six or eight thousand people - passed the circus on their way to hear Lincoln. Warner had received the committee’s promise to begin the program at noon, and they said it would finish at two p.m.

The speaking was delayed half-an-hour, Warner reported, and I listened to Mr. Lincoln for a while, and then went to the tents to prepare for the crowd. A few minutes before two o’clock, the feature of our parade was drawn up to the grove, ready to allure the crowd to the tents when the speaking closed. It was an immense cage containing a woman surrounded by a dozen large pythons and anacondas, drawn by forty horses driven by a single man (Major Derth). Atop the cage sat a big band.

Two o’clock came. Mr. Lincoln seemed no nearer his conclusion than when he began.

‘I must have the crowd,’ I demanded of the master of ceremonies.

‘Oh, give us a few more minutes,’ he begged.

‘I’ll give you ten.’

Watch in hand, I waited. When the time was up, the rail-splitter was still rending the air with his eloquence. Evidently, he was just becoming seriously and earnestly interested in his subject. If our show was to get any of these people, it must get them before sundown.

I stepped to the road and waved my hand. The woman shook up the serpents. The band struck up a lively air. The procession moved and only the committee and a few personal friends were left to hear the eloquent peroration for which Abe Lincoln was famous.

Our tents were not half large enough for that crowd.16

13 American Circus Anthology.
14 Register, Friday, September 10, 1858, p. 2.
15 Lincoln Day By Day, Earl Schenck Miers, editor, Morningside, Dayton, Ohio, 1991, p. 228. Chicago Tribune, September 14, 1858. Register, September 10, 1858. (Hereafter referred to as Day By Day.)
16 American Circus Anthology.
October 13, 1858, Quincy, Illinois—Lincoln-Douglas Debate Uses Circus Seats

Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas engaged in seven face-to-face debates that have gone down as the best remembered such events in American history. The only debate involving the circus was held in Quincy, Illinois’ Washington Park, the town square, on October 13, 1858. One Nathan Pinkharn rented [Levi J.] North’s seating for the day, and as often happened, the seats collapsed just as the debate started. There were a number of minor injuries, but the speaking went on.  

1860

May 9, 1860, Decatur, Illinois State Republican Convention—Circus Loans Tent

The state convention that nominated him [Lincoln] as Illinois’ choice was held in Decatur on May 9, 1860, and again, we’re talking about the greatest event in the history of a small town (population 2,000). A 100 x 70 building was erected for the convention. It was a wooden skeleton constructed between two brick buildings, but the funds provided for the lumber could not be stretched to include a roof. Once more, a circus came to the rescue. The contractor borrowed a tent-top and some sidewall from a show that was in the area. We believe this was the Great Van Amburgh Show, since no other circus was in Illinois at the time. Van Amburgh played Springfield May 1, Bloomington May 5, and LaSalle May 11.

Abraham Lincoln in Circus Cartoons During the 1860 Election and His Presidency

During the 1860 presidential election, Abraham Lincoln’s remarkable physical appearance was the subject of cartoons. In several instances he was portrayed as a circus performer. While these cartoons are not something created by Lincoln and are not evidence of his love of the circus, they no doubt were as amusing to Lincoln as his visits to the circus.

The carte de viste below pictures President Abraham Lincoln negotiating “The Tight Rope” between Washington, D.C. and Richmond.

This was Vanity Fair’s first cartoon of Abraham Lincoln, published shortly after the nomination. Blondin had crossed Niagara Falls on a tight-rope, 1100 feet long, stretched 160 feet above the water. The fence rail upon which Lincoln walks is decayed and broken. From the bank, Horace Greeley, worried lest the Negro’s interests should be neglected in Lincoln’s canvass, calls out: ‘Don’t drop the carpet-bag.’

17 American Circus Anthology.
18 American Circus Anthology.
21 Vanity Fair, 1860.
22 Charles Blondin (Jean François Gravelet, 1824-1897) was a French-born acrobat who became famous in the late 1850s for his daring tightrope walks over Niagara Falls. He repeated the feat several times while performing various stunts, such as drinking a bottle of wine, eating a meal, standing on his head, standing on one foot, walking blindfolded, hanging by his feet, pushing a wheelbarrow, laying down, and walking on stilts.
The Great Exhibition of 1860 was the title of a cartoon published by Currier & Ives. It depicts politicians and newspaper editors as circus side-shows.

Abolitionist editor Horace Greeley (left) grinds his New York “Tribune” organ as candidate Abraham Lincoln (center, riding on a wooden rail) rides the “Republican Platform” split rail and has a lock on his mouth prances to the music. Lincoln is tethered with a cord to Greeley’s index finger, and his lips are padlocked shut. Although the abolitionist bias of the party was well-known, Lincoln and the Republicans tried to de-emphasize the slavery issue during the 1860 campaign. Editors Henry Raymond and James Gordon Bennett, Sr. beg for alms to maintain the abolition issue. Seward, carrying a black child, claims the child and his “Irrepressible Conflict” are the true head of the party.  

In the cartoon below, President Lincoln is portrayed as a circus magician attempting to swallow the sword of war.

The stunt that Lincoln—in the guise of Blondin—performs in this Harper’s Weekly cartoon refers to the time when Blondin carried his 136-lb. agent, Henry Colcord, on his back while crossing Niagara Falls on a tightrope. … In the artist’s view, the Republican party’s stance on slavery is a burden on Lincoln’s shoulders as he tries to win the presidential election. The U.S. Constitution, however, is Lincoln’s balancing rod that keeps him steady and allows him to reach his goal.

Great and astonishing trick of Old Abe, the Western juggler.

This wood engraving cartoon portrays Abraham Lincoln as a circus performer doing some ceiling walking. Below him is a crowd looking worried, while in the balcony are men in business suits looking unhappy. While hanging upside down, Lincoln barely hangs on, by one foot, to the issue of Emancipation. He could grab the other rings, but they represent “utter ruin,” and other problems from his presidency.

Yankee Olmar

1861

The Lincoln Family at Barnum’s in New York City:
February 20, 1861

February 20, 1861, Tuesday. Showman P. R. Barnum, invites Lincoln to museum, but he does not go; Mrs. Lincoln and children accept.

Young Lincoln Don’t Care About Bears.

New York Herald 2/21/61, Correspondence Feb. 20, 1861.

On Tuesday afternoon, soon after Lincoln’s arrival in the city [New York], Mr. Barnum, the “Prince of Showmen,” waited upon him (Abraham Lincoln) at the Astor House, and invited him to visit the Museum. Mr. Lincoln said that he would certainly attend some time during yesterday. “Don’t forget,” said Barnum. “You’re ‘Honest Old Abe;’ I shall rely upon you, and I’ll advertise you.” The advertisement appeared, but Mr. Lincoln didn’t. A great many people took this opportunity of seeing the President elect, together with the other curiosities, but they were unfortunately disappointed. They saw the great Lincoln turkey, however, and looked as though they enjoyed it. They didn’t, though, for how can one enjoy the sight of a fine fowl fattened for another person to eat?

At about two o’clock P. M. the nurse and the elder of the Lincoln juveniles, [Robert] accompanied by officer Dolan of the Second precinct, visited Barnum’s Museum. The youngest Lincoln [Tad, almost 8 years old] would not go. “He could see plenty of bears in the country he came from, and he did not want to see Barnum’s.” So he was left behind, and several persons who could not get the chance of shaking Lincoln by the hand took this opportunity to shake that of his youngest son.

During the morning Bob Lincoln, the rail prince, dropped into the Museum and looked through its spacious halls. The “What Is it” enjoyed his distinguished consideration; the Aztec children looked wilder than ever as he faced them, descendants of a long and thin line of kings as they are; the lightning calculator dropped his chalk, and for the first time made only a small mistake in his addition. The

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26 Indiana Historical Society Jack Smith Lincoln Graphics Collection. The term “olmar” comes from the name of an actual circus performer, James Chadwick, who would perform ceiling walking 90 feet in the air. 1862-11-15 http://freespace.virgin.net/m.killy/grace.htm
28 New York Herald, February 21, 1861, Correspondence, February 20, 1861.
young Prince wanted to consult Madame Delmonte, the fortune teller, upon the future of the country, but having connection with extremely Southern latitudes, she rather favored secession. If Mr. Barnum had only left young Lincoln to himself, no one could have recognized him as the son of the President.

Mrs. Lincoln, a handsome matronly lady, paid the Museum a visit, also, and sent her children, with their nurse, to see the “Woman in White” and sit with Mr. Barnum in his private box. Such of the party as could write inscribed their names upon the visitors’ book...there was no extraordinary crowd, and very little attention paid to the distinguished visitors. The manner in which the brass band executed the national airs was the most remarkable event of the day at the Museum.

A devotee of circuses and menageries in Springfield, it was said he [Lincoln] could repeat what the clown had ‘got off’ long after the performers had left.  

**Willie and Tad Lincoln Conduct Circus in the White House Attic**

Historian Ruth Painter Randall has written a wonderful description of the Lincoln boys playing in the attic of the White House where they have set up a circus and charged admission to all of the White House staff.

...when Julia [Taft] came over with clean “blouses” for her little brothers, she found all the servants and White House staff grinning broadly. The boys, she was told, were in the attic. When she had climbed the stairs, she came upon a most lively scene. Tad rushed at her shouting excitedly, “Come quick, Julie. We’re having a circus. I’ve got to be blacked up and Willie can’t get his dress on and Bud’s bonnet won’t fit.” Behind a curtain made of two sheets pinned together was a motley audience of soldiers, servants, and anybody else, black or white, who could muster up the five cents which was the admission charge. There was no snobbery in Willie or Tad.

Julia kept the “program” of the circus which Willie himself had printed. It gives much interesting information. Several of the boys’ friends were in the cast, especially on Billy Sanders and one Joe Corkhead. Tad was to play the part of the “The Black Statue.” In “III. Part,” and when Julia arrived, he was flourishing a bottle of shoe polish which he intended to use as make-up. She took it away from him and made him up with burnt cork instead. Bud and Willie were to be lovely Victorian ladies in the show and each one was struggling into a dress belonging to Mrs. Lincoln. Julia pinned up the train of Willie’s dress and the surplus folds of Bud’s and straightened the latter’s bonnet. She then by request bedaubed the “ladies” of the cast liberally with “Bloom of Youth.”

The show opened patriotically with a rousing rendition of “Hail Columbia” by the entire “troupe.” Billy Sanders and Tad Lincoln then sang “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Loyal Unionism having thus been demonstrated, there followed a duet of “Dixie Land” by Joe Corkhead and Bud Taft. Bud doubtless an irresistible Southern belle in Mrs. Lincoln’s white morning gown and a stylish bonnet. Willie, in voluminous lilac silk of his mother’s, cut very décolleté, probably stirred deep emotions in the audience when he joined in a duet of “Home Sweet Home.” Both Lincoln boys evidently could sing, which was an accomplishment their father did not have. Tad had been practicing “Old Abe Lincoln Came out of the Wilderness” for the show but was apparently talked out of it, for it does not appear on the program.

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29 *The Rise of the American Circus*, p. 189.

Program of the “Circus” in the White House, Printed by Willie Lincoln

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Letter of Phineas T. Barnum to Abraham Lincoln, August 30, 1861

Lindencroft
Bridgeport Ct
Aug 30th 1861
Honored Sir

The late events which have occurred in this vicinity, concluding with the arrest of Schnabel, have rendered secessionists so scarce, I cannot find one for exhibition in my museum.

Those who one week ago were blatant secessionists are today publicly announcing themselves as ‘in for the country to the end of the war’. The “strong arm” has a mighty influence here.

Truly Yours
P. T. Barnum

Phineas T. Barnum to Abraham Lincoln, Friday, August 30, 1861

1862

Summer 1862

President Lincoln Enjoys the Circus

“Peanuts, popcorn, lemonade and sawdust, taken in equal parts under a canvas, and a few hours of laughter thrown in at the right time, will cure the worst case of blues on record,” said dear old Abe Lincoln after he had visited a circus. During all the time Lincoln was in Washington, and especially in the summer of 1862, when everything looked so black, he never missed a circus, and always seemed to consider it the height of delight to take his little boy—now Robert Lincoln, minister to England [not correct son]—to spend several hours under the big tent, during which time he always patronized the peanut, popcorn and lemonade “butchers,” and seemed to forget all about the cares of office, and so it is with all our great men. They find more pleasure and enjoyment in the circus than any other class of amusement. That jolly little comedienne, Nellie McHenry, comes about as near giving a whole circus herself as anybody every heard of. Her rollicking fun and truly clever bits of wit in her new circo-comedy, “A Night at the Circus,” will make the good people of Portland laugh as Abe Lincoln did at the circus, when she opens at the Marquam Grand next week.

Oregonian, Portland, Oregon, Tuesday, August 30, 1892.

32 The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 2. General Correspondence. 1858-1864. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d4210600))
33 Oregonian, Portland, Oregon, Tuesday, August 30, 1892, p. 7.
November 1862

President Lincoln Invites Phineas T. Barnum to White House

In 1862, Phineas T. Barnum visited President Abraham Lincoln at the White House with newly discovered giantess Anna Swan and Commodore Nutt, a new Tom Thumb.

During the darkest days of the American Civil War in November 1862, President Abraham Lincoln invited Barnum and Nutt to the White House. Entering the Washington, D.C. dwelling, the showman was told the President was in a special cabinet meeting, but had left word to have Barnum and his little companion announced when they arrived. Barnum realized his visit may have been something of an imposition upon the busy President, and made a mental note to keep his visit brief.

The visitors were announced, and Lincoln interrupted his cabinet session to greet Barnum and Nutt. Pleasantries were passed about, and Nutt asked Secretary Chase of the Treasury if he was the man who was spending so much of Uncle Sam’s money. Stanton, Secretary of War, interrupted to declare that he was the man. “Well,” said Nutt to everyone’s amusement, “It is in a good cause, anyhow, and I guess it will come out all right.”

As Barnum and Nutt prepared to leave, President Lincoln bowed at the waist and took Nutt’s hand in his own. He suggested to the Commodore that he “wade ashore” should his “fleet” ever be in danger. Nutt looked up and down Lincoln’s long legs and joked, “I guess, Mr. President, you could do that better than I could.”

1863

Tom Thumb Visits White House: February 13, 1863

On February 13, 1863, a honeymoon Party was held at the White House for Charles S. Stratton and Livinia Warren, who had been married shortly before in New York City. “He was twenty-four years old, thirty-two inches high, and weight twenty-one pounds. She was four years younger, of the same height, and eight pounds heavier. Only a few [days] before, the ‘distinguished Lilliputians’ had been married in New York City, and P.T. Barnum, super-showman of the day who had the ‘General’ under contract, had lost no time in publicizing the vent and arrange to have the couple presented to chiefs of republics and royal sovereigns,” wrote Stanley Kimmel. 1 Warren and Stratton, who was known as General Tom Thumb, came to Washington where Stratton’s brother was stationed with the Union Army. They stayed at Willard’s Hotel before attending a well-publicized, well-attended reception at the White House in their honor.

February 13, 1863. Mrs. Lincoln gives a small evening reception for 50 guests in honor of “Gen. Tom Thumb” [Charles S. Stratton] and bride [Lavinia Warren].

Robert Lincoln coldly refused to attend the event, remaining upstairs, and openly criticized his mother, quipping “I do not propose to assist in entertaining Tom Thumb. My notions of duty are somewhat different than yours” (Wead 2003, 179). 35

February 14, 1863. Mr. and Mrs. C. S. Stratton leave White House, having been overnight guests. 36

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East Room: Reception for General Tom Thumb

The Friday reception, which son Robert condescendingly refused to attend, was one of the first events at the White House following a year-long mourning period for Willie. Livinia Warren said later that the “President took our hands and led us to the sofa, lifting the General up and placed him at his left hand, while Mrs. Lincoln did the same serve for me, placing me at her right...

Tad, the favorite son, stood beside his mother and gazing at me...whispered to his mother, ‘Mother if you were a little woman like Mrs. Stratton you would look just like her.”

Another attendee noted of the newly-weds: “With profound respect they looked up, up, to [Mr. Lincoln’s] kindly face. It was pleasant to see their tall host bend, and bend, to take their little hands in his great palm, holding Made’s with special chariness, as though it were a robin’s egg, and he were afraid of breaking it.”

Mrs. Lincoln’s biographer, Ishbel Ross, wrote: “Mrs. Tom Thumb sparkled with diamonds. Her heavy white satin dress, made by Madame Demorest, the New York fashion arbiter of the day, was looped with carnation buds and green leaves. Tom Thumb shone and glittered too, with sparkling breastpins, shiny patent-leather shoes and white kid gloves of infinitesimal size. They were an endearing pair as their wizened features crinkled up in smiles and laughter.”

One witness recalled that “while the bride and groom were taking a quiet promenade by themselves up and down the big drawing-room, I noticed the President gazing after them with a smile of quaint humor; but, in his beautiful, sorrow-shadowed eyes, there was something more than amusement – a gentle, human sympathy in the apparent happiness and good-fellowship of this curious wedded pair – come to him out of fairyland.”

Journalist Grace Greenwood recalled: “Mr. Lincoln’s dress was sombre black, unrelieved except by gloves of white or very light kid, which had a rather ghastly effect on his large, bony hands. But Mrs. Lincoln was gay enough in attire – a low-necked gown of rich pink silk, with flounces climbing high up, over a hoop-skirt trellis, and pink roses in her hair. She was not handsome, but her manner was pleasant and kindly.” She wrote: “The reception took place in the East room; and when, following the loud announcement, ‘Mr. and Mrs. Charles Stratton,’ the guests of honor entered from the corridor, and walked slowly up the long salon, to where Mr. And Mrs. Lincoln stood, to welcome them, the scene became interesting, though a little bizarre. The pigmy ‘General,’ at that time still rather good-looking, though slightly blasé, wore his elegant wedding suit, and his wife, a plump but symmetrical little woman, with a bright, intelligent face, her wedding dress – the regulation white satin, with point lace, orange blossoms and pearls - while a train some two yards long swept out behind her. I well remember the ‘pigeon-like stateliness’ with which they advanced, almost to the feet of the President, and the profound respect with which they looked up, up, to his kindly face. It was pleasant to see their tall host bend, and bend, to take their little hands in his great palm, holding Madame’s with especial chariness, as though it were a robin’s egg, and he were fearful of breaking it. Yet he did not talk down to them, but made them feel from the first as though he regarded them as real ‘folks,’ sensible, and knowing a good deal of the world. He presented them, very courteously and soberly, to Mrs. Lincoln, and in his compliments and congratulations there was not the slightest touch of the exaggeration which a lesser man might have been tempted to make use of, for the quiet amusement of on-lookers; in fact, nothing to reveal to that shrewd little pair his keen sense of the incongruity of the scene. He was, I think, most amused by the interest and curiosity of his ‘little Tad,’ who seemed disposed to patronize the diminutive gentleman and lady, grown up and married, yet lacking his lordly inches. When refreshments were being served, he graciously superintended his mother’s kindly arrangements, by which the distinguished little folk were able to take their cake, wine and ices comfortably, off a chair.”

The next day, Mrs. Lincoln held her regular Saturday afternoon reception. The crowd was enormous because, Mrs. Lincoln supposed, they expected to see Stratton and Warren.

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President Lincoln and Dan Rice

Dan Rice (1823-1900) spent nearly six decades either onstage or within a circus ring, attaining a status that no other clown or single performer has since matched. He was a performing clown, circus owner, political satirist, recognized humorist, friend of presidents and even a one-time presidential candidate himself. Rice brought the circus clown to the forefront and gave the historical stage, roaming and minstrel clown its permanent home under the circus

Mr. Lincoln carried his love of circuses into the Presidential Mansion, inviting his old friend Dan Rice to visit whenever he was in Washington, going so far as to provide his presidential carriage for the trip. Once, he even used the clown’s lowly social status to scare away a prominent Republican who had arrived to present some unwanted resolutions.38

Lincoln and Dan Rice were warm personal friends at an early day, when Dan used to show his circus “down in Illinoy,” where Lincoln was practicing law in a humble way. And singularly enough, this friendship was continued by Mr. Lincoln after he became President of the United States. And when it might be supposed that the pressure of responsibility and care would drive all circus memories out of his mind.

Whenever Dan Rice visited Washington with his show during the gloomy years from 1861 to 1865, he was invited to the White House after the evening performance, and usually the Presidential carriage was waiting for him, so that he could get there as soon as possible.

Lincoln received him in his private office, and all ceremony being laid aside, the two humorists would exchange jokes and stories, live over by-gone times and scenes in which the humorous predominated, and have a mutually refreshing season of it.

On one of these occasions, when, as usual, orders had been given to admit nobody, a card was brought up. Lincoln rebuked the servant for the unwelcome interference, and then looking at the card, said, “Well, Dan, there’s no help for it; we must let him in. He’s a big bug from Massachusetts, and it won’t do to deny him now that he has sent in his name. But you stay and I’ll soon get rid of him.”

The Waupaca Republican, March 21, 1890

When the door opened a dignified representative of the highest respectability of Boston entered, and, saluting the President, announced himself as a committee charged to present a set of resolutions passed at a large Republican meeting in his State. They were a severe criticism on Mr. Lincoln’s administration, and demanded “a more vigorous prosecution of the war.”

Mr. Lincoln took the paper without reply and then said, “Beg, pardon Mr. ----; but before we proceed further let me introduce to you my particular friend, Col. Dan Rice.”

Dan stood up and delivered his best bow, but the gentleman from Boston was struck dumb with amazement and indignation. To be introduced to a circus clown by the President of the United States was too much for him; he managed to stammer a few words of leave-taking and departed in haste.

As the door closed upon the committee Lincoln turned to Rice with a hearty laugh, and said: “Dan, wasn’t that well done? Didn’t it take the wind out of him nicely?”

Dan admitted that it was a perfect success, and the interrupted conversation was resumed with renewed zest.39

38 The Rise of the American Circus, p. 189.
Conclusion

The evidence I have found and presented here I believe is sufficient to support my belief that Abraham Lincoln loved the circus. That love tells us much about this man—his connection to the people and popular culture of ante bellum Illinois, his love of children and animals, his love of humor, his personal need for antidotes for his melancholy, his humility and lack of pretention, his neighborliness, his love for his sons and his being a good father, his willingness to share something that he loved with others, young children, his consistency of personality when elevated from Illinois lawyer to President, and his love of entertainment in general. This was Abraham Lincoln.

The Ringmaster


Ringmaster depicts Lincoln’s top-hatted head with arms and legs coming out of it juggling cuts of meat, as other diversions take place around him. A dollop of Mr. Ryden’s drollery goes a very long way. Swallow quickly so you don’t taste it going down.

The Circus Advertisements

The advertisements that follow are in chronological order. For most of them I have been able to prepare a summary of the information contained in these ads. Using *Lincoln Day By Day*, I have also noted in the heading before each circus ad whether or not Lincoln was in Springfield on the circus days given. I started to prepare a biographical section with biographies of each person named, but it is an overwhelming task and doesn’t add to my purpose of revealing the ads and proposing Lincoln’s love of the circus. If the reader wishes more information about any given name, I suggest that they Google that name. There are many fine histories of the circus in America and some of them that I have used are noted in the footnotes. I hope that you enjoy these circus advertisements as much as I have.

Circuses in Lincoln’s Springfield

1833

Lincoln Attends A Summer Circus in Springfield

In the summer of 1833, the first circus to perform in Springfield was attended by Abraham Lincoln, then a New Salem resident. Springfield’s population was approximately 900. Evidence of Lincoln’s attendance is found in the following 1902 reminiscence of T. G. Onstot, a resident of New Salem in 1833.40 This undoubtedly was the first circus attended by Lincoln.

There were two things connected with the show, which astonished the people wonderfully. One was a monster anaconda snake eighteen feet long, and the other a young lady who stood on a horse and rode at full speed around the ring.41

40 For the full transcript of the *Onstot Reminiscence*, see page 3.
41 *Onstot Reminiscence*, p. 3.
1837

**Miller, Yale & Sands Menagerie and Circus United**

**Wednesday and Thursday, June 21 and 22, 1837**

The first advertisement for a circus in Springfield appeared on the front page of the *Sangamo Journal* on June 17, 1837. The circus was to be held in Springfield on Wednesday and Thursday, June 21 and 22. Abraham Lincoln moved to Springfield on April 15, 1837, and was in Springfield on these dates.

**Proprietors:** Miller, Yale & Sands  
**Band:** 12 members.  
**Admission:** 50¢. Children = ½ price.  
**Itinerary:**  
June 9 Carrollton  
June 10 Whitehall  
June 12 Manchester  
June 13 Winchester  
June 10 Petersburg  
June 20 Salisbury

... the menagerie and circus of Miller, Yale & Sands...had traveled in Illinois and Missouri during 1837. ...  

http://www.circushistory.org/Thayer/Thayer3m.htm  
1838

H. A. Woodward & Co. Menagerie and Circus
Thursday and Friday, June 7 and 8, 1838

Abraham Lincoln was probably in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietor: H. A. Woodward & Co.
Animal Keeper: Mr. Lewis
Lions: 1
Elephants: 1 Flora, a female Asian elephant, was imported to the United States around 1827. After 1838 there is no trace of her.
Camel: 1
Leopards: 3
Zebra: 1
Band: Military Band
Admission: 50¢. Children under 10 = ½ price.

The division [of Miller, Yale & Sands] into two companies occurred in St. Louis in May, 1838. Richard Sands took Whitlock, Den Stone, John Shaffer and the leopard den, plus six others to northern Illinois and Michigan under the title H. A. Woodward & Co. Woodward, mentioned nowhere prior to this, was an agent for the Mabie brothers in the early fifties.47

47 http://www.circushistory.org/Thayer/Thayer3m.htm  Stuart Thayer, American Circus Anthology, Essays of the Early Years, arranged and edited by William L. Slout.
48 Sangamo Journal, Saturday, June 2, 1838, p. 3.
1840

William Seely The Menagerie and Circus

Thursday and Friday, October 8 and 9, 1840

Abraham Lincoln was probably in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietor: William Seely
Advertiser: George R. Brunson
Lioness: 1
Tiger: 1
Elephants: 1 male
Giraffe: 1
Zebra: 1
Lama: 1
Leopards: 2
Dromedary: 1
Ostriches: 2
Monkeys, Apes and Baboons.
Band: yes.
Admission: 50¢. Children = ½ price.
Itinerary:
  October 5  Winchester
  October 6  Jacksonville
  October 7  Berlin
  October 10 Auburn

Sangamo Journal, Friday, October 2, 1840.49

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49 Sangamo Journal, Friday, October 2, 1840, p. 3.
Circuses In Lincoln's Springfield (1833-1860)

1841

June, Titus, Angevine & Co. Circus and Caravan
Monday and Tuesday, September 6 and 7, 1841

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates.

**Proprietors:** June, Titus, Angevine & Co.
The principals were brothers John J. (1802-1884) and James M. June (1809-1862); Lewis B. Titus (1800-1870); and Caleb S. Angevine (1798-1859).

**Advertiser:** George R. Brunson

**Equestrian Director:** Richard Sands

**Elephants:** 1
**Giraffe:** 1
**Gymnast:** Rivers Family

**Band:** Band of Musicians

**Admission:** 50¢. Children = ½ price.

**Itinerary:**
- September 3: Shelbyville
- September 8: Berlin

With Richard Sands as Equestrian Manager, the company offered horsemanship by American and European riders, the Rivers Family (late from Astley’s) and others “in every department of the Olympic Exercises.” Accompanying them was a Band of Musicians performing popular tunes. The menagerie, it was noted, had “intelligent and obliging keepers” who took great pains in responding to the wishes of the audience. G. R. Brunson was their advertiser. Sadly, their giraffe died at Richmond, Iowa, in November; it was valued at $20,000.51

There was a three-year gap between the 1841 June, Titus, Angevine & Co. Circus and Caravan and the next circus to come to Springfield in 1845, Howes & Mabie Olympic Arena of New York Circus.

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50 Sangamo Journal, Friday, August 27, 1841, p. 3.
51 The Rise of the American Circus, p. 141.
1845

Howes & Mabie Olympic Arena or New York Circus

Thursday and Friday, August 14 and 15, 1845

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietors: Howes & Mabie
Equestrian Director: H. P. Madigan
Band: Brass Band
Troupe Size: 16
Performers: Howes, Waterman, Madigan, Stone, McCollum, Jackson, Ruggles, Blackwood, Rice, Blake, Percell, Kelley, Moore, Bremner, Bachellor, Malory and Clavean.
Admission:
Boxes: 50¢.
Children to Boxes = ½ price.
Pit: 25¢.
Performances:
2:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

In 1840 Edmund Foster Mabie (1810-67) and Jeremiah Mabie (1812-67), from the vicinity of Patterson in upstate New York, founded their first Mabie Bros. Circus. Throughout their careers, the Mabie brothers toured their circus under a variety of names with a number of different partners and managers. With circus maven Seth B. Howes as a partner and manager in their first operation, The Howes & Mabie Circus toured throughout the East and into the Midwest. The brothers purchased 1,000 acres near Delavan, Wisconsin and moved the circus’s winter quarters there in 1847.54

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52 Sangamo Journal, Friday, August 27, 1841, p. 3.
53 Sangamo Journal, Thursday, August 14, 1845, p. 3.
54 Two Hundred Years of the American Circus, Tom Ogden, Facts on File, Inc., New York, 1993, p. 241. (Hereafter referred to as Ogden.)
1846

June & Turner New York Circus
Wednesday and Thursday, September 2 and 3, 1846

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietors: June & Turner
(James M. June and Aron Turner)
Ringmaster: A. McFarland
Equestrian Director: Timothy V. Turner
Riding Master: Napoleon B. Turner
Clown: Alex Rockwell
Band: Brass Band, led by Mr. Volger
Troupe Size: 80 men and horses.
Performers:
Timothy V. Turner, Napoleon B. Turner, J. W. Myers, A. McFarland, N. Burgess, H. Hough, J. Turner, L. Freeman, O. Bell, A. Rockwell, S. Johnson, C. Fletcher, Master Turner, Master Lipman, Keenan and his band of Ethiopian Serenaders

Admission:
Boxes: 40¢.
Children under 10, to Box 20¢.
Pit: 20¢. No half price to the Pit.

Performances:
2:00 p.m.
7:00 p.m.

Sangamo Journal, Thursday, August 27, 1846.55

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55 Sangamo Journal, Thursday, August 27, 1846, p. 3.
1847

E. F. Mabie & Co. Grand Olympic and U. S. Circus

Thursday and Friday, April 22 and 23, 1847

Abraham Lincoln might have been in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietors: E. F. Mabie & Co.
Manager: Edmund F. Mabie
Ringmaster: M. Buckley
Equestrian Director: Walter Waterman
Equestrians: Laura and Henry Buckley
Clowns: G. Moore
Specialty: Giants: Mr. & Mrs. Randall
Band: Brass Band
Troupe Size: 150 men and horses.
Performers:

Admission:
Box: 50¢.
Children under 10 = ½ price of Box.
Pit 25¢.

Performances:
2:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

Journal, Thursday, April 15, 1847.
June and Turner’s Menagerie and Circus

Monday and Tuesday, May 17 and 18, 1847

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietors: June & Turner
Manager: James M. June
Agent: William June
Ringmaster: James W. Myers
Equestrian Director: Timothy V. Turner
Clown: H. W. Turner
Specialty: Splendid Chariot
Band: New York Military Brass Band
Band Leader: S. B. W. Post
Tent Size: 150’ x 75’ Grand Pavilion
Capacity: 3,000.
Performances: 2:30 p.m.
7:00 p.m.

“Combined, Enlarged and Improved” for 1847, “June & Turner’s Menagerie and Circus” featured James M. June as manager and William June as agent. Adding animals provided the excuse to raise prices (admission to both attractions cost 40 cents, with children half price.) Performers listed were Timothy V. Turner, Equestrian Director; H. W. Nichols as Clown; James W., Myers as Riding Master; and S. B. W. Post as Leader of the Band. Their Grand Pavilion was new, covering an area 160x76 feet, constructed of weatherproof material and large enough to accommodate 3,000 persons. Mr. Post’s New York Military Band was carried by Chariot drawn by Eight Cream colored Horses wearing harnesses richly silver-mounted in pattern work, manufactured by Francis of New York City.57

Journal, Thursday, May 13, 1847.58

57 The Rise of the American Circus, p. 157.
58 Journal, Thursday, May 13, 1847, p. 3.
Spalding’s Monster Circus

October 1847

The Spalding Monster Circus most likely did not make its way to Springfield.

Proprietor: Gilbert R. Spalding.  
Manager: Gilbert R. Spalding.  
Gymnast: Monsieur Macarte, M. Lipman, J. M’Farland, V. Piguet, Rossiter  
Specialty: Parisian Equestrieme.  
Band: Kendall’s Brass Band Edward Kendall, bandmaster.  
Troupe Size: 200 persons and horses.  
Capacity: 6,000.  
Admission: 50¢.

Journal, Thursday, September 16, 1847.  
Journal, Thursday, September 30, 1847.  
Journal, Thursday, September 16, 1847.

Gilbert R. “Doc” Spalding owned and operated a drugstore near Albany, New York until 1843, when he became infatuated with show business when he foreclosed on S. H. Nichols’s Amphitheatre. By April 11, 1844, Spalding was on tour in Troy, New York, with his new show, the North American Circus.
Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield
(1833-1860)

Rockwell and Co.’s Mammoth Circus
Saturday, October 23, 1847

On this date, Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield preparing to travel to Washington, D. C.

Proprietors: Rockwell and Co.
Manager: E. G. Mead
Agent: Charles C. Pell
Masters of the Arena: Nunn and Lake
Equestrian: H. W. Franklin
Equestrian Directors: Thomas Nunn and Mrs. Gossin
Clown: Sol J. Lipman
Gymnast: Acrobat Family
Performers: Thomas Nunn, H. W. Franklin, C. Sherwood, Mr. Harrington, Mrs. J. Gussin, B. Runnels, B. Stevens, Prof. Galsianno.
Band: Fohs and Wood
Troupe Size: 200 men & horses.
Capacity: 4,000.
Admission:
Reserved seats: 50¢.
Boxes 25¢.
Performances:
2:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m.
Itinerary:
October 16 Peoria
October 18 Farmington
October 19 Canton
October 20 Lewiston
October 21 Havana
October 22 Petersburg

Press agents were always careful to emphasize the moral character of their performances. The people were assured that “the most fastidious” could listen to the jokes of Rockwell & Company’s clown “without a blush.”

Paul Angle
Here I Have Lived

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Journal, Thursday, October 7, 1847.

62 Here I Have Lived, Paul Angle, The Abraham Lincoln Association, Springfield, Illinois, 1935, p. 49. (Hereafter referred to as Here I Have Lived.)
63 Journal, Thursday, October 7, 1847, p. 3.
64 Journal, Thursday, October 7, 1847, p. 2.
1848

E. F. & J. Mabie Grand Olympic Arena and U. S. Circus
Friday and Saturday, June 9 and 10, 1848

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietors: E. F. & J. Mabie
Manager: Edmand F. Mabie
Agent: J. W. Burgess
Ringmaster: M. Buckley
Equestrian Director: M. Buckley
Equestrians:
Laura and Henry Buckley, E. W. Perry, G. Backsloe, J. Goodspeed, G. Moore, A. Parker, D. Martin, T. Osborn, E. H. Toronlye, Lucian, Julian and Albert Holland, the Holland Family
Clowns: G. Moore
Specialty: Giants: Mr. & Mrs. Randall
Band: Brass Band  P. S. Putnam, leader
Troupe Size: 150 men and horses.
Admission:
Boxes: 50¢.
Children under 10 = ½ price.
Pit: 25¢.
Performances:
2: 00 p.m.
7:30 p.m.
Itinerary:
June 5 Shelbyville
June 6 Sullivan
June 7 Decatur
June 8 Mechanicsburg

Journal, Thursday, June 1, 1848.65

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65 Journal, Thursday, June 1, 1848, p. 2.
Welch, Delavan & Nathan’s National Circus
Wednesday and Thursday, August 9 and 10, 1848

Abraham Lincoln was in Washington, D.C. on these dates.

Proprietors: Welch, Delavan & Nathan
Agent: J. W. Bancker
Ringmaster: N. Johnson
Equestrian Director: J. J. Nathan
Equestrians:
Frank Pastor, William Pastor, Richard Rivers
James Hawkins
Lion Tamers: W. T. Willey
Gymnast: J. J. Nathan
Attendance: 5,000 total.
Admission: 25¢.
Itinerary:
August 7    Shelbyville
August 8    Taylorville
August 11   Petersburg
August 12   Havana

Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield
(1833-1860)

Journal, August 16, 1848.66

Journal, Wednesday, August 2, 1848.67
Raymond & Co.’s Mammoth Menagerie and Herr Driesbach

Tuesday, August 22, 1848

Abraham Lincoln was not present in Springfield on this date.

Proprietors: Raymond & Co.  
Lion Tamer: Herr Driesbach  
Elephant: Hannibal  
Lions, Tigers, Leopards: yes.  
Band: New York Brass Band  
Troupe Size: 60 men and horses.  
Admission: 30¢. Children under ten, 15¢.  
Itinerary:  
- August 21: Petersburg  
- August 23: Berlin  
- August 24: Jacksonville

“The moral and useful purposes which an exhibition like this can serve are perceived by all, and acknowledged by all moralists and thinking minds; the exhibition serves to entertain and instruct all in the wondrous works of the Supreme Being, and is particularly impressive on the minds of youth.”

Journal, Wednesday, August 16, 1848.
1849

**E. F. & J. Mabie Grand Olympic Arena and U. S. Circus**

Tuesday and Wednesday, June 19 and 20, 1849

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on these dates.

**Proprietors:** E. F. & J. Mabie & Co.

**Manager:** E. F. Mabie

**Ringmaster:** M. Buckley

**Equestrian Director:** W. Waterman

**Equestrians:** W. Waterman, Henry Buckley, J. Goodspeed, A. Parker, E. Crosbee, J. Tellman, Lucian, Julian and Albert Holland, Mary Ann Wells.

**Clowns:** Sol. J. Lipman and John Wells

**Viola:** John Kelly

**Specialty:** Holland Family

**Band:** N. Lebrun, leader of the Brass Band

**Troupe Size:** 150 men and horses.

**Capacity:** 3,000.

**Admission:** 25¢. No half prices.

**Location:** “... great tent near the Globe Hotel...”

**Performances:**

2:00 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

**Itinerary:**

June 13   Paris
June 14   Charleston
June 15   Cochran’s Grove
June 16   Shelbyville
June 18   Taylorville
June 21   Petersburg

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**Mabie’s Circus.—This establishment arrived here last night, and has pitched its great tent near the Globe Hotel. It will be seen by an advertisement on the outside of this paper, that the company is considerably enlarged, and embraces many of the best performers of the age. It will remain here but two days.**

*Journal, Wednesday, June 20, 1849.*

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**CIRCUS! E. F. & J. MABIE, PROPRIETORS; GRAND OLYMPIC ARENA AND U. S. CIRCUS; Consisting of 160 Men and Horses!**

*Manager: E. F. Mabie. Equestrian Director, Mr. W. Waterman. Clowns, Movers, Sol. J. Lipman, and J. Wells, Leader of the Band, Mr. Lebrun.*

**THE public of Springfield and vicinity are respectfully informed that the above-named individuals will open the season of their Grand Olympic and U.S. Circus in the city of Springfield, on Tuesday and Wednesday the 18th and 19th of June, 1849, for two days only.**

**Capacity:** 3,000.

**Admission:** 25¢. No half prices.

**Performances:**

2:00 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

**Location:** “... great tent near the Globe Hotel...”

**Performers:**


**Band:** N. Lebrun, leader of the Brass Band

**Troupe Size:** 150 men and horses.

**Capacity:** 3,000.

**Admission:** 25¢. No half prices.

**Location:** “… great tent near the Globe Hotel...”

**Performances:**

2:00 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

**Itinerary:**

June 13   Paris
June 14   Charleston
June 15   Cochran’s Grove
June 16   Shelbyville
June 18   Taylorville
June 21   Petersburg

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**Specimen of the Joumal of the Day of 9th of June, 1849.**

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69 *Journal, Wednesday, June 20, 1849, p. 3.*

70 *Journal, Wednesday, June 6, 1849, p. 2.*
Apparently the public did not follow the Doctor’s recommendation that they refrain from attending circuses. Over 7,000 people attended the Crane & Co. circus in Springfield on August 27 and 28.
Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield (1833-1860)

Crane & Co.’s Great Oriental Circus
Monday and Tuesday, August 27 and 28, 1849

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietor: Crane & Co.
Clown: W. H. Kemp
Camels: 10
Band: New York Sax Horn Band, P. Fohs, leader
Troupe Size: 240 men and horses.
Capacity: 5,000.
Attendance: 7,000.
Admission: 25¢. Children under 2 years of age free.

Performances:
2:00 p.m.
7:00 p.m.

Itinerary:
August 6  St. Charles  August 21  Lewiston
August 7  Naperville  August 22  Vanot
August 8  Aurora  August 23  Beardstown
August 9  Joliet  August 24  Virginia
August 10  Mora  August 25  Jacksonville
August 11  Ottawa  August 29  Mt. Pulaski
August 13  Hennepin  August 30  Decatur
August 14  Lacon  August 31  Sullivan
August 15  Washington  September 1  Charleston
August 16  Tremont  September 3  Paris
August 17  Pekin  September 4  Terre Haute
August 18  Farmington
August 20  Canton

Journal, Saturday, August 25, 1849.
Journal, Monday, August 27, 1849.
Journal, Tuesday, August 28, 1849.

75 Journal, Saturday, August 25, 1849, p. 3.
76 Journal, Monday, August 27, 1849, p. 3.
77 Journal, Tuesday, August 28, 1849, p. 3.
78 Journal, Wednesday, August 15, 1849, p. 3.
Circuses In Lincoln's Springfield
(1833-1860)

1850

E. F. & J. Mabie Grand Olympic Arena and U. S. Circus
Tuesday, May 28, 1850

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this day.

Manager: E. F. Mabie
Agent: H. A. Woodward
Equestrian Director: W. Waterman
Equestrians: W. Waterman, H. Buckley, J. Goodspeed, A. Parker, E. Croshee, J. Tolman, Lucian, Julian and Albert (the Holland Family).
Clowns: John May, John Wells. John May the celebrated clown was born in Cherry Valley Otsego county New York May 7th 1816. He was struck on the head out West by a stone from the effects of which he became insane. He died in the insane department of the Blockley Almshouse June 12th 1854.
Band: Brass Band Leader, Mr. Putnam
Troupe Size: 150 men.
Admission:
Boxes: 50¢.
Pit: 25¢. No half price to Pit.
Performances:
2:00 p.m.
7:30 p.m.
Itinerary:
May 24 Virginia
May 27 Jacksonville

Register, Monday, May 27, 1850.82

Journal, Saturday, May 18, 1850.79

Journal, Friday, May 17, 1850.80

Journal, Sunday, May 26, 1850.81
Crane & Co.'s Great Oriental Circus
Friday and Saturday, August 2 and 3, 1850

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates.

**Proprietor:** Crane & Co.

**Equestrian Director:** William Armstrong

**Equestrians:** Mlle Rosa, H. P. Madigan, Mr. H. A. Gardner.

**Clowns:** Joe Pantland and Mr. Linning

**Entertainment:** Sig Bliss, contortionist

**Gymnast:** Murray & Reed

**Camels:** 10.

**Small Ponies:** 12.

**Band:** E. Schutz, Band Director

**Troupe Size:** 150 men.

**Capacity:** 4,000.

**Admission:** 25¢. Children under 10, 15¢.

**Performances:**
- Doors open:
  - 2:30 p.m.
  - 7:15 p.m.

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83 *Journal*, Wednesday, May 29, 1850.
84 *Journal*, Tuesday, July 9, 1850.
85 *Journal*, Tuesday, July 23, 1850.
86 *Journal*, Friday, August 2, 1850.
87 *Journal*, Tuesday, July 23, 1850.
88 *Journal*, Saturday, August 3, 1850.
American Circus

Wednesday and Thursday, September 25 and 26, 1850

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on these dates.

**Proprietor and Manager:** S. Burges  
**Agent:** N. G. Tyron  
**Equestrian Director:** C. Sherwood  
**Clown:** Bill Lake  
**Band:** Beeler’s Cornet Band  
**Capacity:** 3,000  
**Admission:**  
- Boxes: 50¢  
- Children 25¢ to Box  
- Pit: 25¢  
**Performances:**  
- 7:30 p.m.  
- 2:00 p.m.  
**Itinerary:**  
- September 23 Naples  
- September 24 Jacksonville  
- September 27 Petersburg  
- September 28 Virginia

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Journal, Saturday, September 21, 1850.

Journal, Thursday, September 26, 1850.

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89 *Journal*, Saturday, September 21, 1850, p. 3.
90 *Journal*, Thursday, September 26, 1850, p. 3.
Circuses In Lincoln's Springfield (1833-1860)

The Manager of the American Circus, Mr. Burgess, at the close of the performances last night came forward and offered to give the proceeds of the evening, saving expenses, to the orphans and widows of our city, if gentlemen present would appoint a committee to call upon him in the morning and distribute the same. No movement was made to secure this donation, although it must have amounted to a very snug sum —for the canvas was crowded.

Journal, Friday, September 27, 1850.91

Register, Thursday, September 26, 1850.92
1851

E. F. & J. Mabie’s Grand Olympic Arena and U. S. Circus
Saturday, May 10, 1851

Abraham Lincoln was not present in Springfield on this date.

**Proprietors:** E. F. & J. Mabie
**Manager:** E. F. & J. Mabie
**Agent:** A. H. Woodward
**Equestrians:** Henry Buckley, M’lle Rosa, H. P. Madigan.
**Clown:** Alex Rockwell
**Band:** Brass Band, P. S. Putnam, leader.
**Capacity:** 3,000.
**Admission:**
- Boxes 50¢.
- Children under 12 = ½ price to boxes.
- Pit 25¢. No half prices for children to pit.

**Performances:**
- 2:00 p.m.

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Register, Tuesday, May 6, 1851

The Maybie Circus exhibits this afternoon and evening in this city.

Journal, Saturday, May 10, 1851

The Register says of Mabie’s Circus: “This poor show levied its annual tribute upon our citizens on Saturday last, but the harvest was not as abundant as formerly. We understand that it has gone north. We have no doubt the press will give the people a proper appreciation of the miserable concern.”

As an evidence of the character of this “concern,” we state that a large number of persons left the tent, long before the performance was concluded on Saturday night.

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93 Register, Tuesday, May 6, 1851, p. 2.
94 Journal, Saturday, May 10, 1851, p. 3.
95 Journal, Tuesday, April 29, 1851, p. 3.
96 Journal, Saturday, May 10, 1851, p. 2.
97 Journal, Wednesday, May 14, 1851, p. 3.
Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield
(1833-1860)

1852

Great United States Circus
Older & Co. (formerly Mabie’s Circus)

Friday, May 15, 1852

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date

**Proprietor:** Older & Co.

**Equestrian Manager:** W. Waterman

**Equestrians:** Henry Buckley, Mons Germani, M’llle Marieita, Madame Horner, W. Chambers.

**Clown:** Pus Horner

**Contortionist:** W. Cole

**Magic Ladder:** Mr. Shoales

**Admission:**

- Boxes 50¢.
- Children under 10 = ½ price to boxes.
- Pit 25¢. No half prices for children to pit.

**Performances:**

- 2:00 p.m.
- 7:00 p.m.

**Itinerary:**

- May 13 Virginia
- May 14 Petersburg

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*Register, Saturday, May 15, 1852* 98

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98 *Register, Saturday, May 15, 1852, p. 2.*
Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield
(1833-1860)

GREAT UNITED STATES

THE MAGNIFICENT

EQUESTRIAN TROOPS OF

OLDE & CO.

WILL PRESENT THEIR AERIAL PERFORMANCE IN VIRGINIA, ON THURSDAY, MAY 13, FRIDAY, MAY 14, AND SATURDAY, MAY 15, 1852.

A Collection of the Greatest Equestrians and Aerial Performers of the World, including the Celebrated

French Equestrian,

MADELEINE DE CASTEL,

and the Celebrated

Aerial Artist,

MARIE-JOSÉ DE CASTEL.

THE COMMUNITY HERE ARE SERIOUSLY THREATENED WITH THE LOSS OF THE TRANSCENDENT GRATIFICATION, IN THE FORM OF THE PRESENT PERFORMANCE. THE PROPIETORS, IN ACCORDANCE TO THE PUBLIC INTEREST, HAVE DECIDED TO ADD THE FOLLOWING ACTS:

The community here are seriously threatened with the loss of the transcendent gratification, in future witnessing the performance of the Mayhew Circus. The proprietors, to accommodate public taste, changed the name of the concern, and added to the cavalesco a hand organ, and two lady performers, from "Italy's sunny clime," or perhaps from the Lower Rhine, as the case may be, and whose traveling carriage will be a very considerable figure in the grand entrance of the company into this city. But we shall not see the organ grinders nor the "Mable company any more. Heigh ho! 'Yo who have tears, prepare to shed them.'

Register, Tuesday, May 18, 1852.

Journal, Saturday, May 15, 1852.

Register, Tuesday, May 18, 1852, p. 3.

Journal, Friday, May 21, 1852, p. 3.

Journal, Saturday, May 15, 1852, p. 3.
The Great French Circus of James M. June & Co.
Saturday, August 28, 1852

Abraham Lincoln was probably in Springfield on this date.

**Proprietor:** Jas. M. June & Co.

**Equestrian Manager:**
Prof. N. Johnson

**Director of French Troupe:**
Mons Tournaiare

**Principal Clown:** W. Worrell

**Second P**
Mons. Mallet

**Band:** Bugle Band

**Band Leader:** R. Willis

**Admission:** 25¢.

**Performances:**
2:00 p.m.
7:00 p.m.

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102 Journal, Friday, August 13, 1852.

103 Register, Saturday, August 28, 1852.
Raymond & Co., and Van Amburgh & Co Menageries United
Tuesday, September 28, 1852

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

Proprietors: Raymond & Co. and Van Amburgh & Co.
Lion Tamers: Mr. Van Amburgh and Mons. Crawford
Elephants: two, Hannibal and Kaaloo-Alia
Horses: 120.
Lions: 4.
Tigers: 3.
Leopards: 2.
Cougars: 2.
Camel: 1.
Band: Brass Band
Tent Size: 300 feet x 100 feet.
Admission: 30¢. Children under 10= 15¢.
Performances: 1 to 4 p.m.

Cat acts in the US began in 1833, when Isaac Van Amburgh first stepped into a cage occupied by a lion, a tiger, a leopard and a panther. Dressed like a Roman gladiator in toga and sandals, Van Amburgh emphasized his domination of the animals by beating them into compliance with a crowbar and thrusting his arm into their mouths, daring them to attack. When he came under attack for spreading cruelty and moral ruin, Van Amburgh quoted the Bible: “Didn’t God say in Genesis 1:26 that men should have dominion over every animal on the earth?” To enhance his case, Van Amburgh actually acted out scenes in the Bible, forcing a lion to lie down with a lamb and even bringing a child from the audience to join them in the ring.\textsuperscript{105}

Van Amburgh’s vicious theatrics gave rise to the so-called American style of feline acts, a style that reached its peak a century later with Clyde Beatty.
1853

P. T. Barnum’s Grand Colossal Museum and Menagerie

Monday, October 3, 1853

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

Proprietor: P. T. Barnum
Lions: 8.
Polar Bear: 1.
Elephants: 10 and one baby.
Specialty: Tom Thumb and Mr. Nellis
Band: Military Band
Admission: 30¢.
  Children under 9 years = ½ price.
Location: East Side of Square.
Itinerary:
  September 28  Winchester
  September 29  Jacksonville
  September 30  Virginia
  October 1  Petersburg

Decatur, Monticello, Urbana and Danville

Circuses continued their visits to Springfield, but none of them aroused such excitement as the organization which set up its big tent on the east side of the square on October 3, 1853—P. T. Barnum’s “Grand Colossal Museum and Menagerie.” Barnum’s name was already a household word—too much so, it would seem, from the wail of disappointment which arose the next day. Tom Thumb was all that he was claimed to be, but the balance of the show was a fraud. The main tent contained “a few old shells, bones, stuffed skins, Indian relics, and a mummy. Next, a load of miserable caricatures, in wax. . . Then eight or ten carriages of animals . . . In the side shows scattered around the square were ballet performers...”

Register, Tuesday, August 23, 1853.  

Register, Friday, September 30, 1853.
1854

Franconi’s Hippodrome
Saturday, May 27, 1854

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

Proprietor: Antoine Franconi
Elephants: yes.
Camels: yes.
Ostriches: yes.
Horses and Ponies: 200.
Troupe Size: 60.
Capacity: 9,000.
Admission:
Boxes: 50¢.
Pit: 25¢.
Performances:
3:00 p.m.
8:00 p.m.

Register, Wednesday, May 10, 1854.110

Journal, Monday, May 29, 1854.109

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109 Journal, Monday, May 29, 1854, p. 3.
110 Register, Wednesday, May 10, 1854, p. 2.
Circuses In Lincoln's Springfield (1833-1860)

THE HIPPODROME.

The question has frequently been proposed to us, “what is a Hippodrome?” As the establishment bearing this title visits Springfield on Saturday, 27th, it may be well to satisfy the curious at this point in a brief explanation and we find it done to our hand by the Indianapolis Journal, whose editor saw the show in New York. He says:

“The Hippodrome differs from the Circus, in that it is of much greater extent. The course is outside the center of the circle, and is about a quarter of a mile in length. The performances are classical and chaste, representative, with great fidelity to historical detail, the sports, contests, and games of the Ancient Amphitheater, and it has no clown.

“The vulgarity of the Circus is entirely lost sight of, and the eye is charmed with graceful exhibitions of daring, skill, and courage, while the mind is satisfied with a more intimate appreciation of what classic lore has herefore dimly unfolded to us in books or the teachings of the school.

“Some of the most beautiful of the effects presented are found in the exhibition of a scene entitled ‘Sophio’s Triumphal Return to Rome after the Conquest of Carthage.’ In this the vast strength and resources of the establishment are brought into full requisition to complete the illusion. The royal conqueror is soon attended by his victorious army headed by their Centurians and followed by the captives and the spoils of war, producing a grand effect that will long remain impressed upon the mind. Then there is the contest on foot and splendidly trained horses, by six notable equestrians, who make the entire course of the course several times, contesting for the prize, and exhibiting an astonishing degree of endurance, agility, and artistic grace. The Roman Brothers give a thrilling illustration of the gladiatorial contests of the arena; and the Charabancs in the ancient Roman style and costume, cut by two chariots driving four horses abreast at their utmost speed, is a sight of terrific splendor and admiration.

“Not the least imposing portion of the spectacle is the great tent of the Hippodrome itself, the largest ever constructed, and capable of accommodating almost the entire population of Indianapoils within its canvas walls. The sight of this immense amphitheater, covering two acres of ground, filled with spectators, strikes the eye with dazzling and bewildering effect.”

We are advised that the company will remain but a day in Springfield, the length of their proposed route, and the necessity of being in New York by a fixed day, prior to their departure for Europe, making it imperative that they should hurry forward.

Journal, Wednesday, May 17, 1854.

ILLINOIS JOURNAL.

SPRINGFIELD, MAY 30, 1854.

Editorial Correspondence.

JACOBSTOWN, May 25.

A car load of Hippodromers, and another of the performers, are due at nine o’clock this morning. A smart shower last night caused considerable delay in the departure of the circus. Two horses high in the show are also due in Springfield, and the Hippodrome girls in high favor. There were some scenes of excitement involving the ballet dancers, and the Scotch giant and clowns.

We meet Jacksonville in a couple of hours. Great interest is centered in the coming of the Roman Brothers, whose shows are described as magnificent. Journal, Tuesday, May 30, 1854.

L. G. Butler’s Arena and Circus
Tuesday and Wednesday, July 18 and 19, 1854

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates.

**Proprietors:** Mr. L. G. Butler
**Ring Master:** F. Morness
**Equestrian Manager:** D. Gardner
**Clown:** Dan Gardner

**Performers:**
Antonio Brothers, Mr. M. Lipman, Mr. L. Lipman,
Mr. Holland, Mr. Canada, T. Osborne, P. Horner.

**Band:** Brass Band, led by Mr. Hess.

**Location:** East part of City.

**Admission:**
- Boxes: 50¢.
- Pit: 25¢.

**Performances:**
- 2:30 p.m.
- 7:30 p.m.
Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield
(1833-1860)

E. F. & J. Mabie’s Circus and Menagerie
Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, October 3, 4 and 5, 1854

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on October 3 and 4, but not on October 5.

Proprietors: E. F. and J. Mabie
Manager: S. B. De Land
Ringmaster: A. Pastor
Equestrian Director: John J. Nathans
Clown: Sol J. Lipman
Lion Tamers: Van Amburg and Mr. Beasley.
Wild Animals: E. Gonung & Co.
Gymnast: The Brothers Seagrass
Specialty: Miss Emma Nathans
Band: Brass Band
Admission: 25 c.
Performances:
1:15 p.m.
6:15 p.m.

Journal, Saturday, October 7, 1854.116

Register, Thursday, September 28, 1854.117

Journal, Thursday, September 28, 1854.118
1855

**Raymond's Amphitheatre and Burlesque Cirque De Hippodrome**

Friday, Saturday, Monday and Tuesday, May 4, 5, 7 and 8, 1855

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on these dates.

**Proprietors:** Raymond's Amphitheatre and Burlesque Cirque De Hippodrome  
**Specialty:** Bear Woman, Opate Indian  
**Band:** The National Brass Band  
**Admission:**  
- General 50¢.  
- Children 25¢.  
**Performances:**  
- 2:30 p.m.  
- 7:30 p.m.

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119 [Register, Saturday, May 5, 1855, p. 2.](#)

120 [Journal, Thursday, May 3, 1855, p. 3.](#)

121 [Register, Saturday, May 5, 1855, p. 2.](#)
W. J. W. Rwick’s Great Western Rail Road Circus
Friday and Saturday, July 6 and 7, 1855

Abraham Lincoln was probably in Chicago on these dates.

**Proprietor:** W. J. W. Rwick  
**Agent:** S. O. Betts  
**Ringmaster:** William Libby  
**Equestrian Director:** Oliver Bell  
**Clowns:** A. Antonia and T. Carter.  
**Performers:** C. Carl, Mr. Marks, W. Sterling, J. Kelly, W. Jones, G. Smith.  
**Banjo Player:** Frank Lynch  
**Specialty:** Madame Olmza  
**Band:** Brass Band  
**Admission:**  
- Boxes: 50¢.  
- Pit: 25¢.  
- No half prices.  
**Performances:**  
- 2:30 p.m.  
- 7:30 p.m.
Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield
(1833-1860)

Sands, Nathans & Co.’s American Circus
Monday, August 20, 1855

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on this date.

Prosperous, Nathans and Co.

The March 20, 1855

Date:

Monday, August 20, 1855

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on this date.

Register, Thursday, August 16, 1855.

Proprietors: Sands, Nathans and Co.
Manager: Richard Sands
Treasurer: J. P. Green
Equestrian Manager: J. J. Nathans
Equestrian: Miss A. Leaman
Clowns: Sam Lathrop, Tom Linton, and James Demott.
Specialty: 20 Lilliputian Ponies.

Monday, August 20, 1855

Register, Thursday, August 16, 1855.

Admission:

Boxes: 50¢.
Pit: 25¢. No half prices.

Performances:

2:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

Journal, Saturday, August 18, 1855.

Journal, Saturday, August 4, 1855.
Circuses in Lincoln's Springfield
(1833-1860)

Journal, Thursday, August 16, 1855.

Register, Saturday, August 11, 1855.

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126 Journal, Thursday, August 16, 1855, p. 2.
127 Register, Saturday, August 11, 1855, p. 3.
Circuses In Lincoln's Springfield
(1833-1860)

Orton's Circus
Thursday, September 6, 1855

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

Journal, Thursday, September 6, 1855.128

Van Amburgh & Co’s Menagerie, Den Stone’s Circus of the People & Tyler’s Indian Exhibition
Monday, September 24, 1855

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

Register, Monday, September 24, 1855.129

Proprietor: Van Amburgh & Co’s Menagerie,
Den Stone’s Circus of the People & Tyler’s Indian Exhibition

Clown: Den Stone


Elephants: 4.

Admission:
Boxes: 50¢.
Pit: 25¢. No half prices.

Performances:
2:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

Mary Stuart to Bettie Stuart
24 September [1855]
[Springfield, Ill.]

Dear Betty,

I was disappointed not to hear from you on Saturday. Sabbath I saw Mrs Williams, she had received a letter from Lou, and said all were well. … Frank is all eagerness about the circus this evening … study hard my daughter, and repay us for the privation of your absence. Aunt is much better, the rest of the family well.

Good by your ever aff’

Mother
[Mrs. John Todd Stuart]131

128 Journal, Thursday, September 6, 1855, p. 3.
129 Register, Monday, September 24, 1855, p. 3.
130 Journal, Thursday, November 8, 1855.
1856

Yankee Robinson’s Big Show
Thursday, May 8, 1856

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on this date.

Proprietor: Fayette Ludovic Robinson
Band: Brass Band
Admission: 40¢.
Children under 10, 20¢.
Performances:
2:00 p.m.
7:00 p.m.
Itinerary:
May 5    Postville
May 6    Middletown
May 7    Petersburg

Register, Wednesday, May 7, 1856.\textsuperscript{132}

Journal, Thursday, May 8, 1856.\textsuperscript{133}

Journal, Thursday, May 8, 1856.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{130} Journal, Thursday, November 8, 1855, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{131} Transcription of letter provided by Ericka Holst, Springfield, Illinois.
\textsuperscript{132} Register, Wednesday, May 7, 1856, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{133} Journal, Thursday, May 8, 1856, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{134} Journal, Thursday, May 8, 1856, p. 3.
Mabie’s Circus Happenings

**Journal, Saturday, May 17, 1856.**

**Register, Wednesday, May 21, 1856.**
Sands, Nathans & Co.’s American Circus
Wednesday, July 16, 1856

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

*Proprietors:* Sands, Nathans & Co.
*Manager:* Richard Sands
*Ringmaster:* C. C. Basset
*Equestrian Director:* J. J. Nathans
*Equestrians:* Mad’lle Camerson
*Elephants:* 6.
*Specialty:* Elephants Victoria and Albert standing on heads.
*Admission:* Boxes: 50¢.
Children under 9 = ½ price.
Pit: 25¢.
*Performances:* 2:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

Journal, Tuesday, July 15, 1856.\(^\text{137}\)

Journal, Monday, July 14, 1856.\(^\text{138}\)

\(^{137}\) *Journal*, Tuesday, July 15, 1856, p. 2.
\(^{138}\) *Journal*, Monday, July 14, 1856, p. 3.
Circuses in Lincoln's Springfield
(1833-1860)

Register, Wednesday, July 16, 1856.139

Journal, Monday, July 7, 1856.140

139 Register, Wednesday, July 16, 1856, p. 3.
140 Journal, Monday, July 7, 1856, p. 3.
Circuses in Lincoln’s Springfield (1833-1860)

G. F. Bailey & Co.’s Combined Circus and Menagerie
Successors to June & Turner’s
Saturday, September 13, 1856

Abraham Lincoln was probably in Springfield on this date.

Agent: E. Smith
Ring Master: Dr. Woolston
Equestrian Director: W. B. Carroll
Equestrian: Luke Rivers
Gymnast: Mr. Nicholls
Clowns: Jim W. Ward, A. Hough
Specialty: La Petite Marie
Band: Brass Band
Performers:
- Lee Brothers
- Madame M. Carroll

Admission:
- Boxes: 50¢
- Children: 25¢

Performances:
- 2:00 p.m.
- 7:00 p.m.

The circus—Bailey’s Circus is in town today, according to appointment. Look out for a big crowd there tonight.

Journal, Saturday, September 13, 1856.

Register, Thursday, September 11, 1856.
Levi J. North’s National Circus
Wednesday and Thursday, September 24 and 25, 1856

Abraham Lincoln was in Decatur on the 24th and in Springfield on the 25th.

Proprietor: Levi J. North
Agent: T. R. Toole
Equestrians: Levi J. North, Tom Osborn.
Aerialist: Miss Castella
Performers: Jack Shepherd, Mr. Kennedy, Naylor, Vincent, Carlisle, Brennen, Wheeler, H. Gardner, Sig. Antonie, Mons. Isadore, Mr. Jas. M’Farland, T. Miller, A. J. Perry, Ella Maybury, Master White, Masters, Henry and George.
Band: Prof. Helms’ National Brass Band
Admission: Box 50¢. Children 25¢.
Performances: 2:30 p.m. 7:30 p.m.
Itinerary: September 23 Waverly
Herr Driesbach & Co.’s
Great Colossal Consolidated Circus & Menagerie

Thursday, October 23, 1856

Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

**Proprietor:** Herr Driesbach
**Agent:** T. R. Toole
**Giraffe:** yes.

**Admission:**
- Boxes: 50¢.
- Children: 25¢.
- Pit: 25¢.

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145 *Journal*, Thursday, October 23, 1856.
146 *Journal*, Thursday, October 23, 1856.
147 *Journal*, Wednesday, October 22, 1856.
1857

Nixon & Kemp’s Great Eastern Circus
Saturday, May 30, 1857

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on this date.

**Proprietors:** Nixon & Kemp

**Clowns:** Tom Linton, Bob Smith, FRMP, W. H. Kemp

**Specialty:** The Calliope and Party of Chinese Jugglers and Artists

**Performers:** Debach, Francis Siegrist, Walter Aymer, Alonzo Hubbel, R. Smith, Masters George and William, Horace Nicholls, M’lle Caroline, M’lle Louise, Mad. Kempton, Miss Richford, Miss Almah

**Gymnast:** M’lle Louisa—wire to top of tent.

**Admission:**
- Boxes: 50¢.
- Pit: 35¢.

**Performances:**
- 2:00 p.m.
- 7:30 p.m.

**Itinerary:**
- May 29    Mechanicsburg
- June 1    Petersburg

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148 *Journal, May 29, 1857, p. 3.*

149 *Journal, June 1, 1857.*
Among the first circuses to employ a calliope were Nixon & Kemp’s Great Eastern Show...

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150 Register, Monday, June 1, 1857, p. 2.
151 Ogden, p. 65.
152 Register, Monday, June 1, 1857, p. 2.
Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on this date.

\textit{Proprietor:} Mr. Lewis B. Lent  
\textit{Performers:} Mad‘lle Agnes Leelereq, Mr. R. Hemming.  
\textit{Specialty:} St George & the Dragon  
\textit{Admission:}  
Boxes: 50¢.  
Children under 9 = ½ price.  
Pit: 25¢.  
\textit{Performances:}  
Afternoon  
Evening

\textit{L. B. LENT'S MAMMOTH NATIONAL CIRCUS.}—Lent's National Cireus, of Philadelphia, will enter Springfield this forenoon, from Petersburg, and will make a grand parade through the principal streets headed by the band chariot drawn by the largest train of horses ever driven by one man. Performances will be given both afternoon and evening, when all the performers comprised in this troupe—will appear in their most wonderful feats. At night the entertainments will conclude with the spectacle of St. George and the Dragon. This company is one of great celebrity, and cannot fail to draw out immense audiences.

A free exhibition will be given in the open air, previous to opening the doors for the afternoon performance, in a double ascension of a tight wire from the ground to the top of the pavilion flag-staff, by Mad‘lle Agnes Leelereq and Mr. R. Hemming, the latter trudging a wheel-barrow over this thread-like pathway.

\textit{Journal}, Saturday, June 27, 1857.\textsuperscript{153}

\textit{Register}, Saturday, June 27, 1857.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Journal}, Saturday, June 27, 1857, p. 3.  
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Register}, Saturday, June 27, 1857, p. 3.
Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on this date.

**Proprietor:** Samuel P. Stickney  
**Manager:** C. L. Wheeler  
**Agent:** O. J. Ferguson  
**Clown:** Sam Lathrop  
**Giraffe:** 1.  
**Elephant:** Hannibal  
**Troupe Size:** 250 men and horses.  
**Performers:**  

**Itinerary:**  
August 11    Jacksonville  
August 15    Berlin

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**Accident and Murder at Circus**

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155 *Journal*, Friday, August 21, 1857.

156 *Register*, Tuesday, August 11, 1857.
Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield
(1833-1860)

Major Brown’s Monster Colloseum and Great American Circus
Friday, October 9, 1857

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

**Proprietor:** Major Brown
**Manager:** H. Cooper
**Agent:** J. S. Fulton
**Equestrian Director:** W. C. Morgan
**Equestrian:** Jerry Worland
**Elephants:** Sands, Nathan & Co. Performing Elephants
**Clown:** Billy Crosby
**Band:** Jackson’s Famous Buckeye Band
**Performers:** I. W. Tucker, Hiram Marks.

**Admission:**
- Boxes: 50¢.
- Pit: 25¢.

**Performances:**
- Open at 2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

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*Register,* Friday, October 2, 1857.
*Journal,* Friday, October 9, 1857.

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157 *Register,* Friday, October 2, 1857, p. 2.
158 *Journal,* Friday, October 9, 1857, p. 2.
1858

Cooper & Myers’ Circus of All Nations
Thursday, Friday and Saturday, April 22, 23 and 24, 1858

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietors: Cooper & Myers
Agent: J. F. Sutton
Equestrian Director: Thomas Graven
Equestrians: 16.
Aerialist: Mad. Worland
Clowns: Buck Gardiner, Kent and Myers.

Admission:
Boxes: 50¢.
Pit: 25¢.
Children under 10, half price to box.

Performances:
2:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m.
Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

**Proprietor:** Levi J. North  
**Equestrians:** Herr Cline, Wm Naylor  
**Clown:** Bob Smith  
**Specialty:** Tightrope - Miss Castella  
**Horses:** Dancing Horse - Tammany & Trick Horse - Spot Beauty.

**Admission:**
- Boxes: 50¢.
- Children under 10 = ½ price.
- Pit: 25¢.

*Burt & Robinson’s Circus*

**Saturday, June 5, 1858**

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on this date.

**Register, Thursday, April 29, 1858.**

**Register, Friday, June 4, 1858.**

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162 *Register, Thursday, April 29, 1858, p. 3.*  
163 *Register, Friday, June 4, 1858, p. 3.*  
164 *Journal, Saturday, June 5, 1858.*
Circuses in Lincoln’s Springfield
(1833-1860)

Spalding & Rogers New Orleans Circus
Monday, September 6, 1858

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

Journal, Saturday, September 4, 1858.167

Proprietors: Spalding & Rogers
Manager: C. J. Rogers
Specialty: M’lle Anna
Band: Ross Excelsior Band
Troupe Size: 9 railway cars.
Admission:
Boxes: 50¢.
Pit: 25¢.
Itinerary:
September 4   Lincoln
September 7    Virden

Journal, Saturday, August 28, 1858.165

Journal, Monday, September 6, 1858.166

Register, Monday, September 6, 1858.168

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165 Journal, Saturday, August 28, 1858, p. 2.
166 Journal, Monday, September 6, 1858, p. 3.
167 Journal, Saturday, September 4, 1858, p. 2.
168 Register, Monday, September 6, 1858, p. 3.
Mabie & Crosby’s French and American Circus
Saturday, October 9, 1858

Abraham Lincoln was not in Springfield on this date.

Proprietors: Mabie & Crosby
Clown: Tony Pastor
Admission:
Boxes: 50¢.
Pit: 25¢.
Children to Box, 25¢.
Performances:
2:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m.
Itinerary:
October 8 Lincoln
October 11 Jacksonville

Journal, Wednesday, October 6, 1858.

Journal, Saturday, October 9, 1858.
1859

Donetti and Col. Wood’s Grand Burlesque Circus

Monday and Tuesday, August 29 and 30, 1859

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates.

Proprietors: Signor Donetti and Col. J. H. Wood

Business Agent: Maj. Burnell


Location: Cook’s Hall, East Side of Square.

Performances:
3:00 p.m.
8:15 p.m.

Donetti, Carlos. Animal trainer. Performed the Great Parisian Troupe of Acting Monkeys, Dogs and Goats on the steamers Banjo and James Raymond, Spalding & Rogers, 1858; Donetti & Woods, 1859. Signor Donetti ... his wonderful acting monkeys, dogs, and goats!

Journal, Thursday, August 25, 1859.

Register, Friday, August 26, 1859.

Journal, Friday, August 26, 1859.

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71 Donetti, Carlos. Animal trainer. Performed the Great Parisian Troupe of Acting Monkeys, Dogs and Goats on the steamers Banjo and James Raymond, Spalding & Rogers, 1858; Donetti & Woods, 1859. Signor Donetti ... his wonderful acting monkeys, dogs, and goats!

72 Journal, Thursday, August 25, 1859, p. 3.

73 Register, Friday, August 26, 1859, p. 2. Journal, Friday, August 26, 1859, p. 2.
1860

Van Amburgh Show

Monday and Tuesday, April 30 and May 1, 1860

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates.

**Proprietor:** Isaac A. Van Amburgh

**Manager:** J. W. Gregory

**Clowns:** James L. Thayer and Nat.

**Performers:** M’lle Jeanette Ellsler, Madam Mellville, M’lle Fredericks, James Mellville, Tom Lenton, F. Rentz, George Sloman, Frank Carpenter, Thomas Shields, Willis Armstrong, John Naylor, Mast. S. & G. Mellville, Dr. Jas. L. Thayer, Nat Austin.

**Specialty:** Isaac Van Amburgh, Acting Mules.

**Lions:** yes.

**Elephant:** Tippoo Saib, Frank Nash keeper.

**Admission:**

Box: 50¢.

Children, half price.

Pit: 25¢. No half price to Pit.

**Performances:** Doors open at 1 and 7:00 p.m.

**Location:** East of Great Western Railroad, between Washington and Adams Streets.

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*Journal*, Friday, April 20, 1860.

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*Journal*, Tuesday, April 24, 1860.

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*Register*, Monday, April 23, 1860.
Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on these dates, but Willie was ill with scarlet fever and Lincoln also suffered from a sore throat and headache.

Proprietor: H. Buckley & Co.
Agent: George S. Cole
Admission: 25¢. Children under 9, 15¢. All box seats.
Performances:
10:00 a.m.
2:00 p.m.
7:00 p.m.
The R. Sands Gigantic Combination Circus
Monday, September 10, 1860

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on this date.

Proprietor: R. Sands
Equestrians: Virginia Sherwood, Charles Sherwood.
Clown: Tony Pastor
Specialty: 20 Shetland Trick Ponies.
Band: Post’s New York Cornet Band
Admission:
Boxes: 50¢.
Pit: 25¢.
Children 25¢ to Box.
Performances:
2:30 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

Police Report Activities
Near Sands’ Circus

Register, Wednesday, September 12, 1860.180

180 Register, Wednesday, September 12, 1860, p. 3.
Circuses In Lincoln’s Springfield
(1833-1860)

Dan Rice’s Great Show

Monday, October 8, 1860

Abraham Lincoln was in Springfield on this date.

Proprietor: D. McLarron
Manager: Charles Warner
Agent: William C. Preston
Supervision: Dan Rice
Equestrian: Madame Zoyah
Specialty: Elephant walks tight rope.
Admission:
  Boxes: 25¢.
  Reserved: 50¢.
  Children: 25¢.
Performances:
  Afternoon
  Night

Dan Rice (1823-1900) spent nearly six decades either onstage or within a circus ring, attaining a status that no other clown or single performer has since matched. He was a performing clown, circus owner, political satirist, recognized humorist, friend of presidents and even a one-time presidential candidate himself. Rice brought the circus clown to the forefront and gave the historical stage, roaming and minstrel clown its permanent home under the circus.

Journal, Wednesday, October 3, 1860.  
Register, Tuesday, October 2, 1860.

182 Register, Tuesday, October 2, 1860, p. 2.
Circuses In Lincoln's Springfield  
(1833-1860)

July 130x456 to 293x709  
[Image 346x487 to 554x709]  
[Image 115x120 to 295x403]  
[Image 372x128 to 518x403]

Dan Rice's Great Show.—By reference to our advertising columns, it may be seen that the immortal Dan will visit our city on Monday next. We are sure that no more agreeable announcement of this character could be made to our readers, nearly all of whom, we presume, have often heard of Dan Rice, formerly the hero of the "One-Horse Show"—the prince of showmen and clowns. For many years past, Dan Rice's name has been a household word among the pleasure-loving people of the whole country, and the announcement of his advent has always been found sufficient to bring together a larger crowd than was necessary.

Dan's exhibition has been entirely purged of the unpleasant features usually attendant upon shows of its class, so that now it is impossible for the most fastidious to find anything therein to which they can raise a reasonable objection. It is one of the most choice and refined entertainments to be witnessed anywhere, and people of both sexes, of the highest social and intellectual rank, do not hesitate to give it their countenance. We advise our readers to attend this great exhibition and judge for themselves.

Journal, Wednesday, October 3, 1860.  

Dan Rice's Great Show.—The celebrated Daniel Rice, Esq., will exhibit his great show in our city this afternoon and evening. A grand public parade will take place this forenoon, about nine or ten o'clock, when our citizens will have an opportunity of witnessing the novel spectacle of a "Indy faire" driving a team of sixteen splendid horses through the streets.—The afternoon exhibition is intended especially for the accommodation of ladies and children, who may wish to avoid a crowd. The resources of the company are such that they will be enabled to give an almost entirely different performance in the evening. We advise all our citizens to go and see the immortal Dan, the most amusing and scientific jester in the United State. See advertisement.

Journal, Monday, October 8, 1860.

City Matters.—The old proverb that "after a storm comes a calm," was verified to the letter in our city yesterday. It would seem that Dan Rice's great show had monopolized the excitement, usually prevailing in Springfield to a greater or less extent, and with its departure had carried it all off with it. The police courts are dull, as the report will show. Yet from the constant flitting to and fro of the "men in livery," the mysterious nod of recognition that passes between them at every corner, the still more mysterious communications among which they occasionally indulge, and which they suddenly bring to a full stop, the moment you come within hearing distance, it would seem that something very startling was about turning up. A few days will probably lead ourselves as well as the public, into the secret. Until then we must content ourselves with true Miltonian-like patience, and live in the hope that something will turn up.

Register, Wednesday, October 10, 1860.

Dan Rice in an Uncle-Sam-like costume to publicize a political speech in 1859.

183 Journal, Wednesday, October 3, 1860, p. 3.
184 Journal, Monday, October 8, 1860, p. 3.
185 Register, Wednesday, October 10, 1860, p. 3.
The Circus in Midwestern Literature

The sense of the circus in 19th century Midwestern life is something I can only dream about. Midwestern authors Mark Twain and Carl Sandburg have captured that sense in writing. Excerpts from Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Sandburg’s *Prairie Town Boy, Fair and Circus Days* are offered here as examples of the literature inspired by the circus in the Mid West.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, a.k.a. Samuel Clemens (1835-1910)

I went to the circus and loafed around the back side till the watchman went by, and then dived in under the tent. I had my twenty-dollar gold piece and some other money, but I reckoned I better save it, because there ain’t no telling how soon you are going to need it, away from home and amongst strangers that way. You can’t be too careful. I ain’t opposed to spending money on circuses when there ain’t no other way, but there ain’t no use in WASTING it on them.

It was a real bully circus. It was the splendidest sight that ever was when they all come riding in, two and two, a gentleman and lady, side by side, the men just in their drawers and undershirts, and no shoes nor stirrups, and resting their hands on their thighs easy and comfortable — there must a been twenty of them — and every lady with a lovely complexion, and perfectly beautiful, and looking just like a gang of real sure-enough queens, and dressed in clothes that cost millions of dollars, and just littered with diamonds. It was a powerful fine sight; I never see anything so lovely. And then one by one they got up and stood, and went a-weaving around the ring so gentle and wavy and graceful, the men looking ever so tall and airy and straight, with their heads bobbing and skinning along, away up there under the tent-roof, and every lady’s rose-leafy dress flapping soft and silky around her hips, and she looking like the most loveliest parasol.

And then faster and faster they went, all of them dancing, first one foot out in the air and then the other, the horses leaning more and more, and the ringmaster going round and round the center-pole, cracking his whip and shouting “Hi! — hi!” and the clown cracking jokes behind him; and by and by all hands dropped the reins, and every lady put her knuckles on her hips and every gentleman folded his arms, and then how the horses did lean over and hump themselves! And so one after the other they all skipped off into the ring, and made the sweetest bow I ever see, and then scampered out, and everybody clapped their hands and went just about wild.

Well, all through the circus they done the most astonishing things; and all the time that clown carried on so it most killed the people. The ringmaster couldn’t ever say a word to him but he was back at him quick as a wink with the funniest things a body ever said; and how he ever COULD think of so many of them, and so sudden and so pat, was what I couldn’t noway understand. Why, I couldn’t a thought of them in a year. And by and by a drunk man tried to get into the ring — said he wanted to ride; said he could ride as well as anybody that ever was. They argued and tried to keep him out, but he wouldn’t listen, and the whole show come to a standstill. Then the people begun to holler at him and make fun of him, and that made him mad, and he begun to rip and tear; so that stirred up the people, and a lot of men begun to pile down off of the benches and swarm towards the ring, saying, “Knock him down! throw him out!” and one or two women begun to scream. So, then, the ringmaster he made a little speech, and said he hoped there wouldn’t be no disturbance, and if the man would promise he wouldn’t make no more trouble he would let him ride if he thought he could stay on the horse. So everybody laughed and said all right, and the man got on. The minute he was on, the horse begun to rip and tear and jump and cavort around, with two circus men hanging on to his bridle trying to hold him, and the drunk man hanging on to his neck, and his heels flying in the air every jump, and the whole crowd of people standing up shouting and laughing till tears rolled down. And at last, sure enough, all the circus men could do, the horse broke loose, and away he went like the very nation, round and round the ring, with that set laying down on him and hanging to his neck, with first one leg hanging most to the ground on one side, and then t’other one on t’other side, and the people just crazy. It warn’t funny to me, though; I was all of a tremble to see his danger. But pretty soon he struggled up astraddle and grabbed the bridle, a-reeling this way and that; and the next minute he sprung up and dropped the bridle and stood! and the horse a-going like a house afire too. He just stood up there, a-sailing around as easy and comfortable as if he warn’t ever drunk in his life -- and then he begun to pull off his clothes and sling them. He shed them so thick they kind of clogged up the air, and altogether he shed seventeen suits. And, then, there he was, slim and handsome, and dressed the gaudiest and prettiest you ever saw, and he lit into that horse with his whip and made him fairly hum -- and finally skipped off, and made his bow and danced off to the dressing-room, and everybody just a-howling with pleasure and astonishment.

Then the ringmaster he see how he had been fooled, and he WAS the sickest ringmaster you ever see, I reckon. Why, it was one of his own men! He had got up that joke all out of his own head, and never let on to nobody. Well, I felt sheepish enough to be took in so, but I wouldn’t a been in that ringmaster’s place, not for a thousand dollars. I don’t know; there may be bullier circuses than what that one was, but I never struck them yet. Anyways, it was plenty good enough for ME; and wherever I run across it, it can have all of MY custom every time.
Well, that night we had OUR show; but there warn’t only about twelve people there — just enough to pay expenses. And they laughed all the time, and that made the duke mad; and everybody left, anyway, before the show was over, but one boy which was asleep. So the duke said these Arkansaw lunkheads couldn’t come up to Shakespeare; what they wanted was low comedy — and maybe something ruther worse than low comedy, he reckoned. He said he could size their style. So next morning he got some big sheets of wrapping paper and some black paint, and drew off some handbills, and stuck them up all over the village. The bills said:

AT THE COURT HOUSE!
FOR 3 NIGHTS ONLY!
The World-Renowned Tragedians
DAVID GARRICK THE YOUNGER!
AND
EDMUND KEAN THE ELDER!
Of the London and Continental
Theatres,
In their Thrilling Tragedy of
THE KING’S CAMELEOPARD,
OR
THE ROYAL NONSEUCH ! ! !
Admission 50 cents.

Then at the bottom was the biggest line of all, which said:

LADIES AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED.

“There,” says he, “if that line don’t fetch them, I don’t know Arkansaw!”

Prairie-town Boy, Fair and Circus Days, Carl Sandburg

When the circus came to town we managed to shake out of sleep at four o’clock in the morning, grab a slice of bread and butter, and make a fast walk to the Q. yards to watch the unloading in early daylight. A grand clear voice the man had who rode his horse a half -block ahead of the elephants in the parade and cried out, “The elephants are coming, watch your horses!” First to one side of the street and then the other he cried it and those who had skittish horses watched them.

The great P. T. Barnum himself never met my eyes but on a bright summer morning I did see Mr. Bailey of the firm of Barnum & Bailey in a black swallowtail coat giving orders and running the circus in the big green pasture that soon was subdivided into city lots. And with the other kids who had seen Bailey I joined in saying, “Wasn’t he something to look at? And think of it, he’s nearly as great a man as Barnum himself!”

After the unloading we went home for a quick breakfast and then a run to the circus grounds, a big pasture at Main and Farnham near the city limits. If we were lucky we got jobs at carrying water for the elephants or lugging to the big tent the boards for the audience to sit on. After three or four hours of this work we were presented with slips of paper that let us in to see the big show in the afternoon. If we hadn’t been lucky and if we didn’t have the fifty cents for a ticket we tried to slide under the canvas and crawl to where we could peek through boards and between legs to see the grand march, the acrobats, the trapezists, the clowns, the hippodrome chariot race given before our eyes as it was in the time of Nero in Rome. Once as I was nearly through the canvas a pair of strong hands caught me by the ankles, yanked me out and threw me for a fall, and a voice told me I could get going.

I walked around to the Side Show. There out front as a free show I saw the man with the elastic skin. He would pull it out from his face and neck and it would snap back into place. There I saw the tattooed man with fish, birds, brunette girls, ships, and many other shapes inked deep into his skin and there too the Oriental Dancing Girl smiling to some giggling farm hands.

The spieler, a man with a thick upcurled mustache, turned to the crowd and let go in a smooth, loud voice:

“La-deez and gen-tul-men, beneath yon canvas we have the curi-aw-si-ties and the mon-straw-si-ties the Wild Man of Borneo, the smallest dwarf ever seen of mankind and the tallest giant that ever came into existence, the most marvelous snake ever brought to your fair city, a man- eating python captured in the darkest jungles of Africa ever penetrated by man. And I would call your particular attention to Jo Jo, the dogfaced boy born forty miles from land and forty miles from sea. The price of admission, la-deez and gen-tul-men, is a dime, ten cents only, the tenth part of a dollar. Buy your tickets now before the big rush comes.”

I had a dime and a nickel. With the dime, I bought a ticket. I went in and I saw the Wild Man of Borneo was a sad little shrimp and his whiskers messy. The Fat Woman, the Dwarf, the Giant seemed to me to be mistakes God had made, that God was absent-minded when he shaped them. I hung around the midget and his wife, watched them sign their names to photographs they sold at ten cents and they were so pleasant and witty that I saw I had guessed wrong about them and they were having more fun out of life than some of the men in the Q. shops.
I stood a long while watching the Giant and noticed he was quiet and satisfied about things. If a smarty asked, “How’s the weather up there?” he might lift one eyebrow and let it pass, for he had heard it often enough. Nor did I feel sorry for the python. He may have been a man-eater but he was sleeping as if he had forgotten whoever it was he had swallowed and digested. After a third or fourth time around, the only one I felt sorry for was the Wild Man of Borneo. He could have been the only lonely creature among all the freaks. The Oriental Dancing Girl certainly was no freak, an average good-looking showgirl, somewhat dark of skin and probably a gypsy.

Later it came over me that at first sight of the freaks I was sad because I was bashful. Except at home and among playmates, it didn’t come easy for me to be looked at. I would pass people on the street and when they had gone by, I would wonder if they had turned their heads for another look at me. Walking down a church aisle between hundreds of people, I had a feeling of eyes on me. This was silly, but when you’re bashful you have that feeling of eyes following you and boring through you. And there at the side show were these people, the freaks and the business, the work, of each one of them was to be looked at. Every week, day by day, they sat or stood up to be looked at by thousands of people and they were paid to be looked at. If some one of them was more looked at than any others there was danger of jealousy on the part of those who didn’t get looked at as much as they wished. Only the Wild Man of Borneo and the python seemed to be careless about whether anyone looked at them or not.

I walked out of the side show with my nickel still in my pocket. I passed the cane stand where a man held out rings and spoke like his tongue was oiled, “Only ten cents for a ring and the cane you ring is the cane you get.” I stopped where a man was cheerfully calling with no letup, “Lemonade, ice-cold lem-o-nade, a nice cool refreshing drink for a nickel, five cents, the twentieth part of a dollar.” I passed by him to hear a laughing voice, “Here’s where you get your hot roasted peanuts, those big double-jointed humpbacked peanuts, five a sack.” I passed him by and still had my nickel.

Then I came to a man sitting on the ground, a deep-chested man with a face that had quiet on it and wouldn’t bawl at you. I noticed he was barefoot. I looked up from his bare feet to see only stumps of arms at his shoulders. Between the first two toes of his right foot he held a card and lifted it toward me and said, “Take it and read it.” I read in perfect handwriting, “I can write your name for you on a card for you to keep. The charge is only ten cents.” I said, “I would if I had the ten cents. All I’ve got is a nickel.” I took out the nickel and turned my pockets inside out and showed him that besides the nickel there was only a knife, a piece of string, and a buckeye. He took the nickel in his left foot. He put a pen between the first two toes of his right foot and on the card wrote “Charles A. Sandburg,” lifted the foot up toward me, and I took the card. It was the prettiest my name had ever been written. His face didn’t change. All the time it kept that quiet look that didn’t strictly belong with a circus. I was near crying. I said some kind of thanks and picked up my feet and ran.

**Bibliography**

All of the circus advertisements reproduced here are from Springfield, Illinois newspapers, the *Journal* and the *Register*. The *Journal* started publication in Springfield in 1831. The *Register* moved to Springfield and began publication there in 1839. I was able to find these ads by using genealogybank.com, an incredible new online resource that allows one to word search these newspapers. Without that resource, I would not have been able to find all of these ads. My thanks to all of the fine circus historians noted in the footnotes for educating me about the early American circus.